

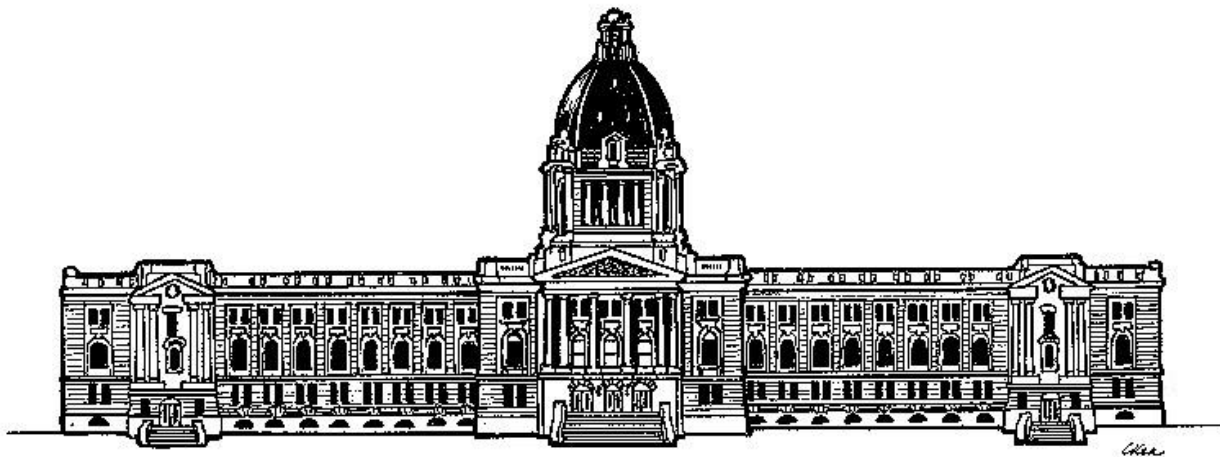


STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE ECONOMY

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Mr. Greg Ottenbreit
Yorkton

Mr. Doug Steele
Cypress Hills

Ms. Aleana Young
Regina University

[The committee met at 15:30.]

The Chair: — All right, folks. Welcome to the Standing Committee on the Economy. I'm Colleen Young and I'll be chairing the meeting this afternoon. We have, sitting in for Jennifer Bowes, Noor Burki. We have member Jared Clarke sitting in for Aleana Young, and we have Daryl Harrison sitting in for Delbert Kirsch. We also have members Ken Francis, Greg Ottenbreit, and Doug Steele joining us here.

Today the committee will be considering the estimates for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development, Innovation Saskatchewan, and the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. We will take a one-hour recess at 5:30.

**General Revenue Fund
Trade and Export Development
Vote 90**

Subvote (TE01)

The Chair: — And we will first consider the estimates for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. And we will begin with consideration of vote 90, Trade and Export Development, central management and services, subvote (TE01).

Minister Harrison is here with his officials. And I ask officials, the first time you speak, to say your name and your title at the mike, and Hansard will turn the mikes on for you. So, Minister, you can begin by introducing your officials, and then your opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Great. Well thank you very much, Madam Chair, and thank you to committee members for being here this afternoon. Today we have a number of officials from Trade and Export Development that are joining us: to my right, Jodi Banks, deputy minister; Tyler Lynch, assistant deputy minister, economic development, behind; Kevin France, assistant deputy minister, international engagement, to my left; Lindsay Freistadt, assistant deputy minister of strategic policy and competitiveness, behind; Jay Teneycke, executive director of marketing and communications; Matt Smith, CEO [chief executive officer] of the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation, behind; and Rob Swallow, our executive director of corporate services, behind as well.

The ministry and I are very proud of what Trade and Export Development has been able to accomplish not just over the last year but over the last number of years. We've seen record private investment into our province and international exports to over 160 countries. And that doesn't just happen by accident. It happens because of the tireless efforts we've put into ensuring the world knows that Saskatchewan is the best place to do business.

We're committed to strengthening our international relations and making it easy to do business here at home. We've worked hard to create the competitive business environment we're experiencing today, one where investors can utilize our suite of incentives and tax credits across all sectors, one that continues to grow the economy, create jobs, and provide opportunities for all those who call this province home.

This year we worked hard to grow our presence in international markets and make meaningful connections with our partners. We've also focused on supporting those already doing business here in Saskatchewan because after all, we know the majority of private capital investment in the province is reinvestment by companies who have already made investments here.

These relationships help us reinforce our reputation as the stable and reliable supplier the world needs to ensure energy and food security. Building on that success is our priority as a ministry. I've also committed to continue standing up for Saskatchewan and growing our province's profile on the world stage both nationally and internationally. We'll continue to stand up for our province and push back against policies and initiatives that aren't in the best interests for our economy or Saskatchewan.

As a province that exports nearly 70 per cent of what we produce, we will continue to ensure Saskatchewan's voice is heard to promote increased market access and the reduction of trade barriers. Because of our reliance on exports, it's vital that we work with our partners here at home, throughout Canada, and across the globe. We are also committed to using the Canadian Free Trade Agreement to strengthen internal trade and reduce regulatory barriers here within the country. This is crucial to ensuring goods and services can flow efficiently and effectively throughout Canada and beyond.

Alongside our commitment to create a business-friendly environment, Trade and Export Development supports the work of Saskatchewan's red tape reduction cabinet committee. This committee just celebrated its 10th-year anniversary and it's been a great decade. Through the hard work of the committee in identifying and addressing excessive, unnecessary, and duplicate requirements, red tape reduction has saved Saskatchewan businesses over \$682 million since 2014.

The committee has reviewed 249 business-related regulations and over 21,000 compliance requirements. They also launched the Help Cut Red Tape web page to allow businesses and the general public to share their priority areas that inform the province's regulatory modernization.

All of this and more is why we are seeing substantial economic growth in Saskatchewan. This year's budget is \$40.589 billion, similar to our 2023-24 budget. Our ministry's goals remain the same: to strengthen the provincial economy for the benefit of Saskatchewan people. We're continuing to focus on international engagement and attracting investment into the province.

Year after year we are seeing more connections made, more partnerships formed, more markets reached, and more positive outcomes for the people of Saskatchewan. We're staying the course because it's working and the numbers prove it. The ministry's work has helped support Saskatchewan businesses to export \$49.3 billion in product in 2023, the second-highest year for international exports in provincial history. Of that, we saw a fourth consecutive year of record agri-food exports valued at \$20.2 billion. This means we've already surpassed our 2030 growth plan target of \$20 billion in agri-food exports years ahead of schedule.

This milestone not only reflects the dedication of Saskatchewan

farmers and producers, but the global demand for the high-quality, sustainably produced agricultural products they consistently deliver. It reinforces that Saskatchewan has the food, fuel, fertilizer, and critical minerals the world needs, and the demand for Saskatchewan products is growing.

Saskatchewan's real gross domestic product, GDP, grew by a nation-leading 6 per cent from 2021-22. The total dollar value of the province's 2022 GDP is \$81.8 billion. The province's GDP is expected to grow by 1.4 per cent in 2024, ranking second in the nation. It's forecasted to grow by another 3.1 per cent in 2025, again ranking second in the nation, and then is expected to lead the nation in growth in 2026 with growth of 3.6 per cent.

Total capital investment in Saskatchewan last year increased nearly 26 per cent to a total of \$17.1 billion, and that puts Saskatchewan second in the nation for growth and capital investment in 2023. And it's expected to go up more, by a remarkable 14.4 per cent to \$19.6 billion next year. This growth is expected to lead the nation in 2024.

What's truly exciting is that we're not just seeing this growth within one sector; it's in all sectors. More than ever before, companies are deciding to invest in our province. For example, Nutrien continues to invest in the province to accelerate potash production capability to 18 million tonnes by 2025. Foran's \$368 million McIlvenna Bay copper mine project is expected to produce an average of 34.5 million pounds of copper and 58.6 million pounds of zinc annually. Plus it will be the world's first net zero copper mine. BHP approved a \$6.5 billion investment for their stage 2 of the Jansen potash project, making its planned total investment in the project nearly \$19 billion, the largest investment the company has ever made into a project. This will double production capacity to approximately 8.5 million tonnes per annum.

Karina Gistelinck, potash asset president for BHP, said it best herself, and I quote:

Saskatchewan's world-class resource base, highly skilled talent, pipeline, and stable and supportive regulatory and investment environment all gave BHP the confidence to make the largest single investment in the company's history right here in Saskatchewan.

With this amount of faith from our investors, it's clear Saskatchewan is on the right track.

Just last summer Louis Dreyfus Company, LDC, announced the expansion of its canola processing complex in Yorkton. Not long after that announcement came another from LDC for a new pea protein production facility. In total these projects will create 120 jobs and have lasting benefits for the surrounding communities and the producers of our province.

And then there's Donald's Fine Foods, a new \$60 million processing plant in Moose Jaw. This will be the largest sow plant in Canada and has capacity for 225,000 sows, and it can employ as many as 200 people when fully operational.

So we see these new facilities being announced and built. Companies who have called Saskatchewan home for generations are expanding as well because of the huge increase in demand.

Crestline Coach is expanding its facility in Saskatoon by an additional 30,000 square feet of manufacturing space. Pro Metal Industries, which is proudly owned by Pasqua First Nation, is expanding its existing facility in Regina in addition to their new facility which is set to open in 2024.

But it's not just our province's private capital investment that's growing. We continue to see record population increases too. More people than ever before are choosing to call Saskatchewan home. Just a few weeks ago we announced an increase of 30,000 people in 2023 — Statistics Canada made that announcement — bringing our total population to an all-time high of 1,225,493. So our population grows. Our economy grows. And people have more incentive, more income to invest back into the businesses and organizations in our communities.

We're growing our province to provide a better quality of life for everyone here, now and into the future. Whether on the economic or population front, this growth is thanks to the hard-working people and the businesses and entrepreneurs located right here in our province. Through this hard work, we're on track to meet and even exceed many of our ambitious growth plan goals by 2030.

These include creating 100,000 new jobs, increasing the value of our exports by 50 per cent, growing Saskatchewan's agri-food exports to \$20 billion, expanding private capital investment in Saskatchewan to \$16 billion, increasing the number of international markets to which we export more than \$1 billion, and crushing 75 per cent of the canola Saskatchewan produces. These are lofty goals but we're meeting them through our strong partnerships and attractive business climate.

To bolster our economy even further, this year's budget provides \$500,000 through a minimum revenue guarantee to the Regina Airport Authority to support a US [United States] direct flight. WestJet and the Regina Airport Authority announced this new direct flight from Regina to Minneapolis in November of 2023. This is in addition to Saskatoon Airport Authority's recent announcement of WestJet's Saskatoon-to-Minneapolis flight moving to a daily service beginning later this month.

These flights to Minneapolis represent more than just an opportunity to fly to a US city. Minneapolis is a key hub, and the direct link means Saskatchewan's connection to our largest trading partner and our neighbour gets even stronger. That gives us more connections to the US for business, tourism, and families.

Another goal that Trade and Export Development focuses on is Indigenous economic opportunities. In March, Trade and Export Development's Indigenous economic development branch hosted the third annual Indigenous Business Gathering. More than 700 people from Indigenous and non-Indigenous businesses, municipalities, Crown corporations, government ministries gathered for this significant event, all of them with one thing in common. They're all looking to develop supply chain procurement and partnership opportunities. The event featured over 85 trade show booths, creating a space for organizations to form new business relationships.

Chief of Lac La Ronge Indian Band Tammy Cook-Searson, who also serves as president of Kitsaki Management, provided the keynote for the 2024 event and had this to say:

Events like the Indigenous Business Gathering are crucial because they foster a unique platform to connect, share knowledge, and build partnerships. Having the opportunity to showcase both the opportunities to do business with and the vibrancy and resiliency of Indigenous businesses contributes significantly to the success of the wider economy and creates diverse and purpose-driven workplaces.

The province continues to support positive relationships with Indigenous communities and helps advance economic reconciliation in the province through the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation, or SIIFC. And my understanding is the federal government just announced a program largely modelled on SIIFC in the budget that they just rolled out today.

The Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation is proud to offer loan guarantees of at least \$5 million to eligible Indigenous groups who are interested in being equity owners in natural resources, value-added agriculture, and related infrastructure projects throughout the province. This is vital to growing, strengthening, diversifying our economy, and improving the quality of life for the people of Saskatchewan.

That quality of life means ensuring opportunities for good jobs and a strong workforce, which is something the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training's recently announced *Building the Workforce for a Growing Economy: The Saskatchewan Labour Market Strategy* will help with. And of course Trade and Export and Immigration and Career Training work closely on these items.

This new labour market strategy is the road map to a secure labour force that keeps pace with the growing demands and opportunities of our economy. Through this strategy we'll prepare Saskatchewan people for jobs, recognize skills in the province, and continue our international recruitment efforts.

[15:45]

All this goes hand in hand with Trade and Export Development's new *Securing the Next Decade of Growth: Saskatchewan's Investment Attraction Strategy*. We've already seen a great deal of success in attracting investment into the province, and with this new strategy we're excited to do even more and attract even more investment.

Our success over the last year comes because we've fostered an environment with low tax and utility rates, expanding focus on red tape reduction and regulatory modernization, client-focused service for current and prospective investors, a skilled workforce, and a network of nine international trade and investment offices. All of this is what makes up the Saskatchewan advantage which puts us a step above the rest compared to other jurisdictions. It's part of our story.

All of this and more is highlighted in the new strategy. Released last month, it's our roadmap to increasing investment in the province to the benefit of everyone who works and lives here. And it's part of our message to the world: Saskatchewan is an excellent place to invest and to do business.

The new strategy is designed around three main themes. The first theme is "build," focused on creating opportunities in new and emerging sectors that are driving the new economy. These new opportunities include critical minerals — and we just had a very exciting announcement two days ago in Saskatoon with the French republic; the Trade minister of France and I made a very significant commitment and signed an agreement — advanced manufacturing, and clean technologies amongst others.

The second theme is "growth." We know most private capital investment in the province is by reinvestment from companies who are already in operation here. We want to capitalize on existing strengths in Saskatchewan's key sectors such as potash, uranium, agriculture, energy, manufacturing, and forestry — the things we've been doing well for decades.

Our final theme is "connect," connecting the world to Saskatchewan and Saskatchewan to the world. We want the world to know what Saskatchewan has to offer. To do just that we've launched a new website as a part of our effort, investsk.ca, which will serve as a gateway to our province for international businesses and investors, providing an overview of the major economic sectors and world-class investment opportunities in Saskatchewan. Whether it's trade missions abroad or welcoming delegations here at home, international engagement is a major driver in growing our economy. And we continue to grow our global reputation as a stable supplier of food, fuel, fertilizer, and critical minerals.

Our international engagement is key. Through our network of nine international offices we are introducing Saskatchewan to new markets and potential partners and investors. We're supporting Saskatchewan businesses, recruiting students, and attracting talent for our labour market. And we'll continue on our path because our international engagement is working. It's thanks to this engagement that we continue to find new markets, see record exports, and will achieve and surpass our growth plan goal of attracting \$16 billion in capital investment.

The new and expanded incentives within the strategy will build on an already strong suite of existing programs in the province, and it's incentives like these that make us the attractive jurisdiction for investment we are today. And we need to remember we are competing for that investment against every other jurisdiction not just within Canada but around the world.

The strategy makes choosing Saskatchewan not just an easy decision but the right decision. Thanks to our cross-ministry approach, we work collaboratively to ensure a cohesive strategy that benefits all Saskatchewan people. But we know that just the strategy is enough to share Saskatchewan's great story. We are a province that is dependent on trade. One in three jobs in Saskatchewan is tied directly to exports, so it's imperative that we remain aggressive on the global stage, actively seeking out new markets and opportunities for Saskatchewan-based companies, working with Saskatchewan-based companies and working with those who are looking to invest with us.

We understand that international engagement is a major driver to grow investment, and the value of our network of nine international offices' providers is becoming more important than ever. The support our offices in Mexico, United Kingdom, Germany, United Arab Emirates, India, Singapore, Vietnam,

China, and Japan provide goes beyond liaising with international organizations and governments, the crucial connecting of Saskatchewan companies with new markets so that their products can reach even further.

Black Fox Farm & Distillery is a prime example of the power of these connections. Co-owner Barb Stefanyshyn-Cote had this to say about the offices, and I quote:

When you're looking at an industry like ours, you're looking for global markets. Right now we do sell across Canada and to Alberta and Ontario. We needed to expand to reach to make this a truly global business. It's been beneficial for us to have the Saskatchewan trade offices in different countries around the world. Having them in China and Germany and also in the UK has been really, really beneficial.

This past year the ministry has led missions to the United States, India, Germany, Mexico, United Kingdom, Poland, Philippines, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates. The Saskatchewan Mexico office supported Canadian Western Agribition by increasing awareness of the province's capabilities in the sector in Chile, Columbia, and Mexico. As a result, 18 Mexican cattle genetic buyers visited Saskatchewan and attended the Canadian western exhibition in November 2023 with anticipated sales of \$1 million in the next 12 months.

Saskatchewan's United Kingdom office, alongside our government, advocated to include biomass in the Government of Canada's clean electricity investment tax credits. The success of these efforts has enabled further progress on two biomass development projects in the province by a UK [United Kingdom] company.

Germany saw 23 Saskatchewan companies attend Agritechnica, Europe's leading trade fair for agricultural machinery, resulting in over 730 trade leads and over 170 deals with anticipated sales of over \$16 million.

In March, the United Arab Emirates office supported a recruitment mission to Dubai, where 177 applicants were interviewed over four days with an aim to fill 150 positions. And we are proud to say that the target was exceeded and job offer letters were provided to 166 applicants.

Saskatchewan has worked incredibly hard on its relationship with India and, because of our dedication, in 2023 the Premier accepted the Canada-India Business Council Member of the Year Award on behalf of the people of Saskatchewan. Growing trade volumes with India, and they have been growing, will continue to illustrate the success of our presence in the market, and continued outcomes will be realized.

Saskatchewan's Singapore office supported a labour recruitment mission in the Philippines, which led to 1,400 job interviews and over 39,000 job applications as well as over 1,000 anticipated nominations for permanent residency through the SINP [Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program]. Negotiations to establish a bilateral framework with the Department of Migrant Workers highlighted the importance at the highest level of the Filipino-Saskatchewan relationship.

In Vietnam a memorandum of understanding was signed between the University of Regina and the University of Da Nang. Saskatchewan Polytech also signed a memorandum of cooperation with Tra Vinh University in Vietnam. Both of these aim to share knowledge and help build our future workforce.

In November 2023 Saskatchewan's China office supported an MOU [memorandum of understanding] between Pulse Canada and the China-Canada commerce of foodstuffs, native produce, animal by-products. This MOU provides an opportunity to strengthen ties between Canada and China's pea protein industries.

In October 2023 Saskatchewan's Japan office supported seven Saskatchewan companies at the Health Ingredients Japan trade show in collaboration with Saskatchewan Trade and Export Partnership, which resulted in sales of \$550,000. Those are some of just the most recent.

Our international engagement took to new heights this past December by attending and hosting Saskatchewan's first-ever pavilion at COP [Conference of the Parties], enforcing our stance and commitment on sustainable economic development. Once there, Saskatchewan hosted over 50 panel discussions and events in the pavilion, highlighting our province's expertise and success in sustainability.

And it is a story to be proud of. As a global leader in many sectors, it was our opportunity to share our story in clean energy and sustainable resource development. We spoke about how our carbon capture, utilization, and storage; enhanced oil recovery; and world-class uranium production are delivering the sustainable fuels that the world needs. For example, Saskatchewan's enhanced oil recovery projects have sequestered more than 40 million tonnes of CO₂ over the last 25 years. That's enough carbon to make 4.5 million homes energy neutral for one year.

We spoke about the progress we're making in nuclear power in our own backyard. As we continue to develop both small modular reactor and microreactor projects, it only makes sense since we're home to the largest high-grade deposits of uranium in the world, all of which are used extensively for nuclear power around the world.

When it came to critical minerals, we shared our ability to supply the world with the resources they need ethically and sustainably. Whether it's potash, helium, uranium, rare earth elements, copper, lithium, and more, we can be the global critical mineral hub the world needs. And we are.

On the agriculture front, we had many discussions around our expertise in sustainable farming solutions, including the use of zero-till farming. Research commissioned by the Global Institute for Food Security found Saskatchewan's net carbon footprint for canola and wheat was more than 60 per cent lower than competing jurisdictions.

But it wasn't just our government sharing the story, it was Saskatchewan businesses themselves. Approximately 60 Saskatchewan businesses, institutions, and organizations joined the delegation to share their stories. Here's just some of what these organizations had to say:

Rhona DeFrari, chief sustainability officer for Cenovus, said:

Participating in the discussions at COP28 provides the opportunity for us to share advancements we've achieved and also gather ideas from business leaders, governments, and researchers from around the world to help further progress our decarbonization efforts.

Chris Lane, CEO for Economic Development Regina, said:

COP28 provides a unique opportunity to exchange knowledge on climate-friendly production on commodities and energy. As the home to an emerging energy and renewable sector, Regina has a vital role to play in those discussions, and we look forward to sharing our story with the world.

And Dr. Steven Webb, CEO for Global Institute for Food Security in Saskatoon, said:

COP28 provides one of the largest global platforms to discuss topics related to climate change, energy, and agriculture. And I'm excited that this opportunity for Saskatchewan highlights some research and advancements we've made to enhance productivity and sustainable food security and to drive trade and exports.

And there were plenty of outcomes from this mission as well, some of which include Westinghouse Electric Company and Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation signing an MOU during COP28 to explore deployment of the eVinci microreactor in the United Arab Emirates; a letter of intent on clean energy to bolster research and development between the University of Regina Petroleum Technology Research Centre and Khalifa University; a letter of intent on nuclear co-operation between the Saskatchewan Research Council and Khalifa University; an MOU on energy innovation between the University of Regina, University of Saskatchewan, and Saskatchewan Polytechnic to begin collaboration on a new post-secondary institution called the Global Institute for Energy, Mines and Society; a major partnership on regenerative agriculture between the Government of Saskatchewan and Bayer to explore sustainable agriculture technologies with an ultimate goal of lowering GHGs [greenhouse gas] in farming.

But there's more to our international engagement than missions abroad. We're also showcasing our story right in our own backyard. In 2023-24 we welcomed 70 incoming diplomatic and commercial visits. Some to note include Emirates Nuclear Energy Corporation; the US ambassador to Canada; High Commissioner of India was just here a couple of weeks ago; the ambassador of Vietnam, who was just here last week I believe; five Nordic ambassadors, including Sweden, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark, who were also just . . . this was all very recent; and the Rt. Hon. Dame Maria Miller as part of the United Kingdom prime minister's trade envoy to Canada.

Whether diplomatic or commercial delegations, they all have one thing in common. They're interested in what Saskatchewan has to offer and interested in investing in our opportunities. And let me tell you, the opportunities are endless. Recent world events, including the continued war in Ukraine, the conflict in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, and the attack on Israel have all

highlighted the global need for secure and stable and reliable food and energy production.

More than ever Saskatchewan can provide food and energy security safely, consistently, and sustainably. And it's only through sharing the province's incredible story and the Saskatchewan advantage that we will remain known as the best place to do business. We're committed to fostering a competitive business environment, offering a suite of incentives, tax credits that make our province one of the best places in the world to do business.

And this is what we call growth and success for the people of the province. More exports, more investment means more jobs for our people, a high standard of living, and economic growth for the province. Through the Saskatchewan advantage we will create new opportunities, grow existing sectors, and connect the world to our province. This will allow us to continue building our economy and the bright future for Saskatchewan people. And with that, Madam Chair, I am happy to take questions.

[16:00]

The Chair: — All right. Thank you, Minister. I'll note that Ms. Aleana Young has joined us here, and I'll open the floor to questions from members.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, Madam Chair, and thank you, Minister, for those opening comments and to your officials for being present here today and all of the work that goes into business as usual for you every day but also in preparing for these meetings. I know it's extensive and I know there are many, many people behind you not here today.

Several times in this past month there's been discussions about the labour shortages currently facing Saskatchewan. And I'm wondering if you can describe for me the size of that labour shortage in the areas of the economy that are looking for additional staff.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — All right, no, appreciate the question. So I actually just looked at some of the team behind us. It looks like we have one other individual who has joined us here, former senior public servant. So I'm not sure if he's going to provide some assistance but my father has joined us as well. So he's a city councillor with the city of Meadow Lake. He's here as part of the SUMA [Saskatchewan Urban Municipalities Association] convention.

The Chair: — Welcome.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'm sure I'll be getting advice afterwards on what I should have done differently Monday.

So you know, I appreciate the question. So with regard to labour shortages, you know, one of the things we've been hearing consistently, and it's been a theme through our stakeholder organizations and our stakeholder outreach that we do very regularly, both through Trade and Export Development and Immigration and Career Training. And I think part of the answer to this question as well speaks to the very close working relationship, very symbiotic working relationship between Trade and Export Development and Immigration and Career Training.

You know, we both had a lot . . . ministries have both had significant input into both the labour market strategy on the one hand and the investment attraction strategy on the other, because they really do go very closely together and really were designed all the way through to be complementary to each other.

So you know, the labour market shortage though really being an issue that hasn't been identified as likely the most acute challenge that a number of sectors . . . it's not every sector, but really the most acute challenge that a number of sectors are facing going forward and really probably the most significant potential impediment to the growth trajectory that we are on in the province based on really historic investment into a number of the different industries in the province.

So these are good challenges to have. You know, I'd rather be dealing with a labour market shortage because of the massive investment coming into the province than historically what had been some of the challenges the province had faced. But nonetheless it's a real challenge and because of that we have worked, probably spent the last nearly two years working with our partners in the space both on the investment attraction side, but on the labour market side as well because they do go together on what a really comprehensive labour market strategy will look like to make sure that employers like BHP are going to have the workforce that they need as they reach different milestones in a construction and into production for these generationally large projects.

So you know, really what the labour market strategy focuses on are three primary pillars, the first of which is making sure that Saskatchewan residents have first and every opportunity to take advantage of the economic opportunities that these investments and our economy are creating. So that really means record investments into things like apprenticeship training, for example. And you know, we'll talk about that a bit more in the Immigration and Career Training estimates.

But we've added, just this year I think nearly 700 seats, or over the course of the last two years, nearly 700 seats through our apprenticeship system that are really focused in trades that we are going to see based on very close collaboration with employers' shortages in going to the future if we weren't in a position to address them now. So you know, really both timing wise and resource wise, we are seeking to be responsible so we've put some very significant additional resources into the apprenticeship system for example.

Post-secondary institutions and I would say, you know, maybe just focusing on the two universities are very, very highly attuned as well to making sure that programming is in place such that those who are going to be graduating are going to be, at least having opportunities to have training in degrees that are going to see increases in demand within the province.

So both, you know, Dr. Stoicheff and Dr. Keshen have both been just very, very good to work with and we've, you know, really made a point. Obviously Dr. Rosia at Sask Poly has just played a very close . . . in a very close relationship as well and we've been around the . . . you know, whether it be labour or recruitment, whether it be negotiation with other international institutions for a variety of things, our post-secondaries have been integrally involved with our international engagement efforts and very,

very closely aligned with our international offices in making sure that, you know, they have access to the folks that they need to.

And you know, we have a number of quotes. I'm maybe going to . . . I'll table some of these later. I'm not going to go through all of them, but literally we have 50 pages of quotes from stakeholders, a big part of which are academic stakeholders, about the value from our international engagement efforts.

So really kind of pillar 1 is around the training, making sure Saskatchewan residents have every opportunity to take advantage of the jobs that are being created. And I would say that's, you know, a significant part of the effort, if not the significant majority part of the effort.

The other parts that are important though to address the labour market shortage you would be seeing around now. I think members around the table and members of the public would see billboards that have gone up here in the last week or two around credential recognition. And really we wanted it to be very straightforward. I wanted to literally say, you have a credential that you have earned from outside of Saskatchewan, you want that credential recognized, call us. And that's basically what the focus of the awareness campaign is about. So you know, that'll be on buses. That'll be at bus stops. That will be on billboards. I'm sure online advertisements have been running for a bit longer now in that regard.

And we've seen because of that a very, very large spike in interest on our credential recognition office, which we set up as a part of the labour market strategy. It's the very first one in Canada. We're the only jurisdiction in the country that actually has a dedicated branch and a dedicated office designed entirely to work with newcomers to have credentials that were obtained from outside of Saskatchewan recognized in Saskatchewan.

And that means working directly with our regulators, which we are committed to doing. And we had put in place the legal framework for that a couple of years ago with *The Labour Mobility and Fair Registration Practices Act*. That created the legal framework for government to work with regulators to make sure that we had the most streamlined system we possibly could in place to have credentials recognized from outside of the country. And I would say our regulators have been very good to work with on a lot of this. I would say almost all of our regulators have been deeply responsive, understanding that there is a challenge and working with our credential recognition office to make sure that the framework exists for credentials to be recognized as seamlessly and streamlined as possible.

So the difference though is that we will directly work with proponents and provide really a path-finding service within not just government but also within the regulatory world to have those credentials recognized.

So you'll see those advertisements around the province. I strongly suspect you're going to see this model emulated around Canada. Most provinces in Canada now have directly copied our labour mobility legislation, literally cut and pasted our labour market mobility legislation, which is good because I think it's a net positive for the country. So that is around the credential recognition piece.

The third part of it is working with our employers who are still, despite efforts on the training within Canada and also on the credential upskilling or recognition piece through that part . . . is around international recruitment.

And we have really pushed hard on an expansion to our provincial nominee program and have built the program really from being very, very small, you know, 17 years ago to now being really responsible for nearly 80 per cent of our international in-migration, the most significant component of international in-migration through a PNP [provincial nominee program] probably anywhere in Canada. There'd be a couple that would be close or within that general area. Most provinces rely more heavily on federal immigration streams. But as a proportion of the overall number of newcomers, we're right at the very top of that through our SINP program.

So we want to make sure though that even with that significant growth in the SINP program and the additional authorities that we had sought, you know, really quite assertively with the federal government and frankly have received most of, we would not hear the federal government quite, I think, announce that they have given us everything we wanted. But you know, we got most of the way there. There are still a few things left that we proposed in our immigration accord that we want to see patriated to our authority through our PNP, but we'll keep working on that.

But really what it has enabled us to do is work directly with our employers. You have really quite specific labour market challenges, job challenges, labour shortages to internationally recruit. So you know, the two missions we did last year that had a significant recruitment component were to Poland, and that was really focused on Ukrainian refugees. I think there's about 3 or 4 million of whom are in Poland, that many of whom had the CUAET [Canada-Ukraine authorization for emergency travel] visa that would enable them to relocate and work to Canada. And we wanted to use both the CUAET component to that but also our SINP program to make sure that there was a long-term path to PR [permanent residence] and to citizenship ultimately.

That was very successful. I mean we recruited hundreds of folks through that mission. Important to remember, these are really employer-driven as well. So we have companies who are saying we're going to hire a set number of welders or we're looking to hire a set number of mechanics or in that case we had airline pilots which they were successful in recruiting for.

So building on that model, we supported a mission to Manila and I think we had about 30-plus employers on that mission to Manila who were seeking to hire I think about 3 or 400 jobs. So we were, you know, hopeful that we would be able to reach that number. As it turned out, not only did we reach that number, there was just an overwhelming degree, overwhelming degree of interest. And yeah we were, out of that, issued I think nearly a thousand PR nominations, again directly hired by employers.

And kind of what happened in that case where you would have a company — I won't kind of single individual companies out — but you know, they would be seeking to hire eight mechanics. And we had one company that ended up coming back with like 22 or something. And it was, you know, an area of acute shortage that they needed to have filled. There were a couple examples on the welding front like that as well where you have really

international standards in a lot of these spaces and especially in the trades. And, you know, we're able to facilitate the recognition of those credentials through . . . Our credential recognition office issue nominations in the most streamlined way possible, literally everybody there. We're turning nominations around in hours on the ground and it really, as a model, worked very, very good.

So we're looking at options — might talk about that maybe a bit in ICT [Immigration and Career Training] estimates — on how to expand that model. TED [Trade and Export Development] obviously plays a central role though in supporting those international efforts on the recruitment front.

So three pillars: training our folks here in Saskatchewan who are already here, credential recognition and upscaling credentials for those who are here as well but had a credential from outside of the province, and recruiting internationally.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. I'll return to the original question. Can you describe for me the size of the labour shortage in the areas of the economy that are looking for additional staff?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean I think we addressed that in both the opening remarks and through that somewhat in-depth reply. I mean we're having labour market shortages in virtually every sector of the economy, more acute in some areas. Which changes over time as well. I mean that's one thing. It's a pretty dynamic space with regard to labour market.

[16:15]

You know, you would have I think Hospitality Saskatchewan that would say that they have had at different points, probably less acute right now than it was a year and a half ago, and that probably . . . That's a reflection of the fact that some of the tailored labour market programming and ICT programming we put in place was effective in addressing some of the challenge they had in the service and hospitality industry.

I would say that where we really are having a challenge right now with some of our large employers is around that trade space, and it's where, you know, there's a projection that we're going to have . . . And these aren't just projections picked out of the air. I mean this is really come to by working with employers like BHP, like Nutrien, like Mosaic, like Cameco. They know what percentage of their workforce in particular trades are going to be either retiring in the next number of years or what they're going to need as far as new employees to actually fill the jobs that are being created because of investments and capital expansion. So that really is an area where we focused on.

So that is why we made significant increases into investment in the apprenticeship training space including, you know, an additional allocation of about a million dollars right before . . . just a few weeks ago in addition to what we had announced already as far as new seats the previous year in addition to the additional seats that we had announced in the budget just not that long ago.

So health care obviously, yeah, that's a big one. You know, the Ministry of Health would probably be better positioned to talk about some of their recruitment efforts in those spaces. We do

support on that, but really a lot of those are led by the Ministry of Health as far as the recruitment efforts. But we do provide support through our international office network and I think increasingly through our credential recognition office, will be playing an important role in that.

But in that health care space, it's an interesting example actually because it was a big part of the discussion that we've had with the Department of Migrant Workers for example in the Philippines where — because of really I think quite a unique relationship that we have established with the government of the Philippines — there has been a significant effort on the part of a number of their different agencies and universities and government to design training programs in their health care system such that they are really congruent with what would be required to have a credential easily recognized within the Saskatchewan system.

So we worked very closely . . . the Ministry of Health had worked closely with them on that, but you know, that's something that . . . an area where obviously there is always room for more. So we work there. I'll leave it there.

Ms. A. Young: — Thanks again. I'm looking for numbers. So what the size of the labour market shortage is that your ministry has identified, and the sectors of the economy specifically that are looking for additional staff, and what the numbers associated with those are.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay, I think I've addressed that, Madam Chair.

Ms. A. Young: — Respectfully, Minister, I've heard you talk about apprenticeships generally. I've heard you talk about health care generally, indicating those questions should go to the Ministry of Health. And I heard you mention hospitality. So what I'm hearing is you're not able or willing to provide numbers associated with specific sectors of the economy that are experiencing labour market shortages.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — This would be better put to the Immigration and Career Training officials. We'll have that in perhaps a more detailed fashion at the next meeting.

Ms. A. Young: — So then as minister for both Trade and Export as well as ICT, one of your responsibilities is obviously to work with these ministries to ensure that the various areas in government are working to ensure that people are either being trained, matched, or brought into Saskatchewan to fill those shortages. In addressing that, you've spoken to the three pillars of your labour market strategy, and that would be how you choose to address that.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, well I'm happy to go through them again. So I'm not sure . . .

Ms. A. Young: — No, it's okay. We've already gone through.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'm not sure the . . .

Ms. A. Young: — I think, 40 minutes . . .

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'm not sure the member would have

quite heard what we were talking about.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — You know, really what we are talking about in the labour market strategy, Madam Chair . . .

The Chair: — Can I just answer? Your question is a valid question, but the ministry folks that would probably have the numbers are not the folks that are here at this moment. So it can be left.

Ms. A. Young: — For sure. I'll move on to a new question then. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Maybe I'll ask a couple of specific questions and go back to labour market. So for SIIFC, that budget remains \$75 million. Is that accurate?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — The allocation through the Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation is \$75 million. That's right.

Ms. A. Young: — Perfect. And you indicated there's a federal program being modelled on that, which is great to hear, and . . .

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — [Inaudible] . . . what was the question, sorry?

Ms. A. Young: — Eligible applicants are able to apply for up to \$5 million. Do you believe that the size of this allocation is sufficient? Both the \$5 million and the \$75 million for the program overall?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I would say that, number one, I think it's important to have context around what we have done. This was really something that's never been done in Saskatchewan before, Madam Chair. We had worked with and identified, rightly identified, an area where there is significant challenge.

I talked about this a bit in public — it hasn't gotten a huge amount of attention from media or others — but the reality is that there are legitimate legal and constitutional barriers that First Nations particularly have in raising equity capital for investment into different projects. And the reason for that really is the nature of how the Constitution is set up as far as seizure or the ability to leverage capital that is located on First Nations.

For most people, you can, for example, if you want to go to the bank and borrow money, whether it's to start a business or for whatever other reason, most people use as collateral, you know, different physical assets that they have, whether that be land, whether that be a home, whether that be other chattels that are capable of being legally used for that purpose.

The challenge that First Nations have is that, for companies and for individuals — and for governments, frankly — is that because of the unique legal status of reserve land, you can't actually borrow against the value of any property or chattel that could be relocated on to reserve by somebody covered by section 35 of the Constitution. So this is really a genuine area in the textbook definition of market failure.

And we really thought hard about how we could address this in the context of real world challenges that First Nation companies and development corporations were having, even where there was a, you know, long-standing relationship, raising capital to have equity positions in projects or companies that were formed for the purpose of advancing an economic interest or an economic objective.

So the solution we came to — and I think Alberta kind of came to the solution at a similar time as us, but I mean, we had worked with them on different things and I think we came to a spot that was similar — was that as government we needed to be able to provide basically . . . I mean, and what it is, it's a loan guarantee to Indigenous governments, corporations, individuals to be able to leverage and invest in and take an equity position in different projects.

And I think that this was the right policy analysis that we worked through on this, and we worked with partners on it. And frankly it's the same conclusion the Government of Canada came to — much too late, I would say. It actually is an area the Government of Canada should have been leading.

You know, we actually were just talking about it before because we haven't fully seen a — Matt Smith, by the way, who runs the SIIFC, to my left — we actually haven't seen all of the details of the federal program. But what we have seen thus far I think is encouraging. And we've had significant input into some of their deliberations on this.

But you know, I would say that given the process that we had went through, this was an appropriate allocation. I wouldn't rule out there being additional allocation going into the future. There's been a very high degree of interest in the program.

You know, we're going to learn through this. One of the things we always really try and do is be nimble and responsive, making sure that whatever programs we have, we're always looking for ways that we can make them better. And that's something that I think really is a part of the culture of Trade and Export Development and ICT.

So you know, the short answer is I think where we are at is a good place. It's far, far in advance of where we had been, you know, 17 years ago in this space. And I think the fact that many Indigenous businesses and governments are working through this process right now I think speaks to the fact that there is a need and a definite interest in being a part of this.

You know, we're going to continue . . . We actually were just talking about this too. Early days, but I think that there are some interesting discussions to be had with the Government of Canada on how we can make sure that our programs work together. You know, we do this through integrated bilateral agreements in the infrastructure space. I think that there is going to be a lot of room for discussion with the Government of Canada in how our program can work with their program to make sure that we are maximizing opportunity for Indigenous governments, businesses, individuals to participate in projects that would be eligible. And we're not entirely sure 100 per cent on what the federal parameters are going to be in some of those things yet, but I think there is significant room for discussion in making these programs work together.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. You mentioned Alberta. My understanding is the Alberta Indigenous Opportunities Corp. is funded, or has up to \$3 billion available. And we're at \$75 million, which is roughly two and a half per cent in comparison to Alberta. Can you speak to that discrepancy?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well I would say again by way of background, this is a brand new . . . a relatively new program, none of which had existed under previous governments in Saskatchewan. This was entirely our initiative moving forward. So I'm not going to rule out kind of what the future would look like. I think there's some very exciting announcements coming, let me put it that way, about what the future of this program is going to look like.

Ms. A. Young: — So a program two and a half per cent the size of Alberta's is currently sufficient?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'm not sure the member fully heard the response. So you know, we are always looking at what options might look like going forward on this, and stay tuned.

Ms. A. Young: — How many projects have been funded?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I'll let Matt maybe speak to where we are going through on this. We're working through many.

Mr. Smith: — Sure. So I'm Matt Smith, CEO of the Saskatchewan Indigenous Investment Finance Corporation. We've had multiple discussions with a very broad range of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous proponents. We do have several applications at different stages of the application process. You know, certainly as the minister, you know, mentioned, it is a new kind of initiative in Saskatchewan, and certainly there's been learning both on, you know, from the Indigenous communities and organizations as well as, you know, the non-Indigenous proponents. So you know, I want to be respectful of kind of confidentiality, but I will say there's multiple applications in front of the SIIFC at the moment.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And SIIFC was launched June 1st, 2022 if I'm correct. Have any projects made their way fully through the application process?

[16:30]

Mr. Smith: — So what I would say in response to that is the application process has a number of phases. So there's an initial application, a pre-application phase where, you know, after that pre-application is submitted the SIIFC will, you know, determine if the applicant is eligible, if the sector is eligible, if the amount is eligible, whatnot. You know, and then from that it moves into a full application whereby the external consultant SIIFC utilizes is brought in to conduct some of that additional analysis. And then it's put before the board.

So I would say that projects have gone to the appropriate stage in that process whereby they were determined to not move further.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So I would maybe add to that. Matt put it well. We are getting . . . I would say for members that, you know, pay attention kind of coming up in the next while. There is going to be some significant and exciting developments, but

we can't pre-announce anything quite yet.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Has any one single project gone through the entire process and been approved and received money?

Mr. Smith: — No.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. Have any dollars gone out the door to project proponents to date?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — You have to remember this is not a grant program. So I'm not sure if the member fully understands how this works.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah, we've canvassed this lots.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — This is a loan guarantee. So the actual resources are provided by either financial institutions or partners in the project, but the role that the Government of Saskatchewan plays in that is guaranteeing the loan for the Indigenous organization.

So there is not a dollar outlay that the Government of Saskatchewan actually makes in this process. So it's important to remember that. And the . . . [inaudible] . . . questions if that was clear.

Ms. A. Young: — Sure. I will . . . I think the minister knew what I meant, but I'll ask it again. How many loans have been guaranteed through this program and what is the value?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — We will be making some announcements.

Ms. A. Young: — So I'm hearing none to date.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — We will be making some announcements soon.

Ms. A. Young: — Like to talk about, as the minister indicated and spoke to in his opening remarks, Government of Saskatchewan's travel to COP. Are all the reported travel costs inclusive?

Mr. France: — Kevin France, assistant deputy minister for international engagement. Thanks for the question. So the question was, are all travel costs inclusive that were publicly reported? Yes. Yes they are.

Ms. A. Young: — And how many officials from the international trade offices were in attendance?

Mr. France: — At COP28? We had . . . Sorry, can you repeat the question? The international office staff? Is that what you said? Yeah. We had four MDs, managing directors, in attendance.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And would their travel costs be included in that universal travel cost that you addressed in your first response? Or are their travel costs, like, tied essentially to the offices?

Mr. France: — Yeah, what we report is the mission cost, not universal travel costs, and so there are costs tied to offices that include travel within regions, travel to events, and so on, as well as travel back home.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, so the travel of the mission directors would not be included in that universal number for the mission to COP?

Mr. France: — So again, universal number being the publicly reported mission costs? No, it's not.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Do you have a figure associated with that travel for the MDs?

Mr. France: — We do not have the breakdown for individual managing director travel to Dubai for COP28.

Ms. A. Young: — So that's not available?

Mr. France: — No.

Ms. A. Young: — Are the travel costs associated with all ministerial staff included?

Mr. France: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — Going back to the MDs for a second, the total costs associated with the MDs in those offices, is that consistent with what was reported in last year's public accounts?

Mr. France: — It's the same amount, yes.

Ms. A. Young: — So my understanding is, and forgive me if I am mistaken on this, that some of them did start halfway through fiscal. So do you have a total dollar value associated with that?

Mr. France: — Can you expand on your question? What are you asking for?

Ms. A. Young: — So I'm asking for the total costs associated with the MDs in each of the offices. If it's . . . Because some of them started half way through last fiscal, the number in last year's public accounts would not be inclusive of the full year-over-year costs, so I'm looking for a dollar value associated with that year.

Mr. France: — And so your question is relative to the public account salaries? Is that what you're asking?

Ms. A. Young: — Inclusive. I'm not sure what would be included in there, if it's salaries, if there's living allowances, if there's travel allowances associated with that.

Mr. France: — Yes.

Ms. A. Young: — I assume you take my meaning. Thank you.

Mr. France: — Yeah. Thanks for the question. So for '24-25 the total budget for our international offices is 13.773 million. And what I'll do is I'll go through the total cost per office. And what's included in the total cost per office is both our Canadian-based salaries, so our managing director's salary as well as our common services agreement with Global Affairs Canada, and then our

locally engaged staff, their salaries as well as their common services agreement through Global Affairs Canada.

And so for our China office it's going to be 878,000; for India, 994,000; Japan, 1.279; Singapore, 1.237 million; Mexico, 1.057 million; UAE [United Arab Emirates], 1.293 million; Vietnam, 935,000; UK, 1.291; and Germany, 1.358, for a total of 13.773.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much for that. And you referenced salary specifically. Is that inclusive of all human resource costs associated with those MDs? Like there wouldn't be additional living allowances or . . . I'm not sure what else would be considered for those folks working internationally, but that number is inclusive?

Mr. France: — Yeah. So there's the salary plus the common services agreement with Global Affairs Canada. Inclusive in the salaries would be, you know, again it's some of the relocation, travel, those type of things. Home, we do allow for a home visit once a year. So it does include some of those, yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. Thank you. So what I'm hearing is those figures provided do cover off the total costs of that specific agreement.

Mr. France: — Yeah. That's fair. Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. In a similar fashion, like office by office, are you able to advise me how many government staff and how many contractors work in each of the offices?

Mr. France: — Yeah, so again our nine international offices, we have a managing director, which is a Canadian-based staff hired through our Public Service Commission, as well as two locally engaged staff. Those are through Global Affairs Canada, staffed through Global Affairs Canada. So essentially they're Canadian staff, and through our common services agreement with the federal government, includes the salaries for those two staff.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay, great. Thank you. Do you have a breakdown of the goods and services expenses budgeted in each office for I suppose the categories of salaries, travel, supplies, equipment rental, consulting?

Mr. France: — So what's budgeted? Yeah.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah.

Mr. France: — Actually just I'll make sure I have the right document in front of me.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So maybe, Madam Chair, maybe in the interim, officials are putting together some information, and Kevin will provide that for the committee. But I think there's an illustrative example. We provided a couple in the introductory remarks about the value of what our offices and our staff, you know — who have been accused of being basically partisan hacks, which frankly is offensive — professional public servants who have done a remarkable job in representing this province around the world.

But here's one example of why we need to be in countries, particularly our important trading partners, representing our interest. And I appreciate the work that is done by our Trade Commissioner Service and by our, you know, diplomatic personnel in different areas around the country. But the reality is that for a lot of missions, Global Affairs Canada missions, their priorities are not Saskatchewan priorities. And that's just a fact. It's a reality. If we are not there representing our interests, they're not going to get represented.

And you know, one of the examples of that was the mission that we undertook to Vietnam last year. That was in January, Jodi, that we were in . . .

Ms. Banks: — December.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — December of last year that we were in Vietnam, and we had recently opened our international office there. Ha Nguyen, who is our MD, done a great job. We just actually . . . I saw him yesterday, actually. He's in country right now. Done a great job.

So we had a number of meetings with some of their large companies there. One of their very large importers, buyers, an important CEO in their system who also was a member of parliament in their system and a part of the governing party, you know, the first thing he raised when we sat down, he's like, you know, we'd like to source more of your ag commodities. Particularly in that case, it was wheat. And the reason being that they were concerned about the reliance that they had on Russian production. That was actually the issue.

Vietnam was, you know, highly reliant on supply from Russia. They were understandably very concerned about the long-term sustainability and reliability of that supply chain and they wanted to diversify the sources from which they would purchase wheat. So they wanted to buy more from our suppliers as it turns out.

So anyway this was raised and we had a discussion around it. And he, you know, the CEO of the company, very large company, he raised the issue and was like, we're not really sure why Canada is prioritizing blueberry exports and really using that as a lever in a bilateral discussion about Canadian wheat exports. And I was kind of like, well we weren't really quite entirely sure. And Jodi was there as well, and Richelle was there. So we weren't entirely sure what that meant.

[16:45]

So the next meeting we had was with the Minister of Agriculture in Vietnam, or actually it was the Minister of Trade was the next meeting. And you know, a very similar discussion where the Minister of Trade just directly raised this: "We do not understand, given our determination to move in the direction of diversifying wheat imports from Canada" — but really from Saskatchewan is where they . . . that's where our companies that we were working with were — "why Canada won't resolve this." You know, it was a phytosanitary issue on wheat exports. "We don't understand. We want to buy more of your stuff, but Canada is leveraging blueberry exports." Basically saying, unless you buy our blueberries we're unprepared to resolve the wheat issue. You know, obviously frustrating. And we had a good discussion about what a path might look like on that.

The next meeting was with the Ag minister, who raised the exact same issue. And finally we just said, look, we are going to make sure that we are working with Canada, and this is going to be the number one issue to be resolved. Because we were at zero dollars in wheat exports that year. That was 2022.

And as it turns out, we would not have known the reason why there was an unwillingness on the part of Canada to resolve the bilateral wheat export issue unless we had been on the ground, where as it turns out, the Liberal government had given direction that they were to leverage Western Canadian wheat exports, valued at hundreds of millions of dollars, for \$150,000 of blueberries from Prince Edward Island where, lo and behold, the Liberal Agriculture minister's riding is. So this issue was resolved in relatively short order.

We had some very positive discussions in following up, as you would have seen just last week. The ambassador from Vietnam to Canada was here talking about the 1,000 per cent increase in wheat exports from Saskatchewan to Vietnam that are going to be worth this year over \$200 million.

That would never have happened but for the fact that we were on the ground, met in person with the decision makers on the Vietnamese side, and were able to resolve the issue. It would never have happened because Canada would still be taking the position that unless there was \$150,000 of blueberry exports from Prince Edward Island in the minister's riding, it was not to be resolved.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Well perhaps while we wait . . .

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I think, Kevin, you actually have an answer on that last question as well, right?

Mr. France: — Yeah, thanks, Minister. And just to the question in terms of what's been allocated to our offices for '24-25, we've allocated in our budget 3.9 million for operational support for each office, divided amongst the offices. I would say that it's not consistent for office per office, because again each office's demands and needs are different and they do vary. However that's the total budgeted amount.

And again to the minister's point, I think what we've seen through our international offices, what we've seen . . . You mentioned COP earlier and managing directors. The reality is is what COP28 provided us was essentially a place where there was over 196 countries attending, and which a lot came from and clients came from and relationships came from our international network. And as such, they were there to facilitate and support those meetings in market at COP28.

You know, and again I hope there's more questions about COP28, because there's a tremendous amount of success and important not just meetings and outcomes and presentations, but really in terms of meaningful impact back here at home. For example we were able to meet with UAE leadership, many investment companies, as well as senior dignitaries. For example, Dr. Thani, who's the Economy minister for the UAE who's expressed interest in Saskatchewan, not just in terms of relationships but really about investment.

And we have shared investment opportunities of over 1.7 billion

with the UAE leadership, and which that is starting to facilitate actually meetings and really conserve, you know, focus in terms of what those investments are, and really hopefully lead into that investment back here at home.

And so when you asked about MDs and market, I think it's important to note that they were there to support both the relationships they have, from whether it's Japan or the other offices in market, to ensure that the story and the messaging that we were doing around COP28, that they were there to hear and meet with the clients and the companies that came from Saskatchewan to participate in COP28.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, maybe I'll just . . .

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you, sir. My question was about the breakdown of goods and services expenses budgeted for each office in salaries, travel, supplies, equipment, consulting, and other expenses. And for the consulting category specifically, I'd like to ask for a list of the specific contracts and services being provided by the contractor that's been budgeted for.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Maybe . . . I'm sure that there'll be . . . The officials are doing some work on that. But maybe just to follow up a little bit on the United Arab Emirates as another example, a case study, a jurisdiction where, you know, we've worked hard to build relationships at the political and decision-making level in that market. And it's a market where — it's interesting — you know, there's not necessarily a large domestic consumer population in the United Arab Emirates. But what there is is a significant secondary export market through the infrastructure that exists in the UAE to move products from Saskatchewan into other parts of the world.

So a lot of the actual export value that you will see that will be allocated to basically a final destination actually is facilitated through the United Arab Emirates and through ports like Jebel Ali, where a lot of our commodities, particularly canola . . . A lot of our canola exports that are accounted for in the exports to other jurisdictions are actually routed through the UAE, which is not showing up necessarily as a UAE export market.

But what it means though is having the political relationships and business relationships really is an opportunity to facilitate a very significant potential increase in the amount of exports. So Dr. Thani, who's their Economy minister, we've had the opportunity to meet and discuss different elements with a number of times.

You know, particularly as it . . . There's a whole number of areas, but I'll just kind of single out one of them, which is around the nuclear file. So the United Arab Emirates are in the process right now of constructing a number of reactors. The first one just went live in the last year, I think even in the last six months or so. But they have a significant nuclear program and are looking to expand that even further.

They have to buy the uranium from somewhere. And there are a number of options around the world that we are in competition for sourcing that uranium commodity. We've worked . . . And I can tell you, we probably weren't on the radar for where they would be sourcing uranium for even three or four years ago. Because of the work that we have done with our partners and our companies here in this province, directly with the decision

makers in the UAE, we have made very significant progress as to where that uranium in the long term will be sourced from.

And you know, we're not making any announcements. They're not mine to make. But again these are things that are resulting in very real economic opportunity and jobs in northern Saskatchewan and very real and significant investment in northern Saskatchewan. So that discussion would not be happening, but for the fact that we were directly engaging with the decision makers in a very personal way.

And our office in the United Arab Emirates has been a big part of how we've facilitated that discussion. In fact the Emirati electric company were here last summer and we toured them through the facilities and the mine sites in northern Saskatchewan. Well we didn't; one of our companies did. And you know, not my announcement to make, but I think we're going to see some pretty positive outcomes.

So again that would not have happened but for the fact that we have international offices. And I'd frankly think, you know, the position of the opposition of shutting down all of our international offices . . . And I mean, let's be clear what these questions are about. They're trying to make the case that somehow the million dollars a year we spend on international offices is completely wasted and it's all for political hacks and blah, blah, blah. I mean, this is utter nonsense. Utter . . . And frankly it's offensive to me as minister that our public servants would be accused of this. But you know, drive-by smears, that's what they do.

So the reality is that we are creating hundreds of millions of dollars of economic activity for our producers, whether they be in the ag sector, whether they be in the mining sector. These are jobs that are being created here in this province because of the work that our dedicated public servants are undertaking around the world every single day, and work that would not be done by the Trudeau-Singh government, whose priority is absolutely not advancing the Western Canadian and Saskatchewan agriculture, energy, and mining sectors. I can guarantee you of that.

So we're going to keep doing it, regardless as to the criticism — unfounded criticism — from those across the way. We're going to keep doing it because it results in benefit, jobs, investment from around the world that creates a better life for our people here in Saskatchewan.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Before your official gets the answer, I just want to pick up on one thing, Minister, that you just said, that uranium from Saskatchewan would not be purchased by those international buyers without the trade office in the UAE. I just want to make sure I understood you correctly. Like the only reason people in the UAE are purchasing uranium from Saskatchewan is not because of Cameco, you know — who accounts for, what, almost 20 per cent of the world's uranium projections, the second-largest uranium company in the world — but it's because of the trade offices. I just want to make sure I got that.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Happy to read a quote. Tim Gitzel, president and CEO of Cameco:

With the intense focus on nuclear energy at COP28, it was

the right time for Cameco to attend its first COP conference. It was bringing together industry and government to discuss net zero opportunities. In Dubai, Cameco joined 120 global companies and industry organizations in signing the net zero nuclear pledge, committing to a goal of tripling nuclear capacity by 2050.

Over the week we made great progress in speaking with governments, utilities, stakeholders, and potential customers about the importance of zero emission nuclear energy powered by Saskatchewan uranium. Cameco was pleased to be a part of the Saskatchewan delegation led by Premier Moe. This week was about helping build a vision for a cleaner world, and we succeeded.

We can find more. I mean, CEO Gitzel made a number of statements around that, including recording a video about the value that Cameco has found in working with our international offices, about the value that Cameco has found in working with the provincial government. We had a great announcement actually just a few months ago at SRC [Saskatchewan Research Council] where, you know, as a partner with Westinghouse, Cameco being a 49 per cent owner of Westinghouse, on the eVinci reactor project.

You know, I think it's fair to say . . . We appreciate Cameco a great deal. A great company, a great Saskatchewan success story. Cameco sees the value, Cameco sees the value of our international office network and the very, very close working relationship that Cameco has with the Government of Saskatchewan, Trade and Export Development, with SRC. We are partners in this, and we work as partners in this because again this results in very real benefits for the people of the province. And I'll leave it there.

Ms. A. Young: — Yeah. Great company. Great leader, Mr. Gitzel. Remarkable things happening there. Recognizing the time, perhaps I will look to get the answer to my questions later through the committee if it's unavailable today, Madam Chair. Is that acceptable?

The Chair: — Do you have the numbers available?

[17:00]

Mr. France: — Yeah, I can speak to . . .

The Chair: — Okay. Thank you.

Mr. France: — Yeah, I can speak to the numbers that was asked. In terms of, again, the total amount of 13.77 that's been allocated into our budget for international offices, you asked about contracts and consultants. None of that money is going towards contracts and consultants. In fact the money goes towards, again, our Canadian-based staff, our managing directors, our common services agreement with Global Affairs Canada.

It's important to note within that common services agreement it includes HR [human resources] management services, information IT [information technology] services, program delivery support, property and material services, security services, and transportation services. As well in that budget, it includes our locally engaged staff, our salary for those locally

engaged staff, the common services agreement tied to those staff as well. And then again, to your question earlier in terms of resources for activities in market.

Ms. A. Young: — Great. Thank you. And earlier you cited the figure of \$3.9 million. That's essentially the money that's spent on oversight and administration here in Saskatchewan for those offices as a whole; is that correct? No?

Mr. France: — No. That 3.9 is operational for the offices.

Ms. A. Young: — Okay. And so then looking at vote 90, of the \$19.271 million, how much of that is being spent essentially like here in Saskatchewan for oversight and administration, and how much is being spent at the offices?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Officials are kind of getting that together.

You know, there was mention of India earlier, one of the markets again where we have really worked hard and where our international staff have really worked hard at building relationships. But I would say that, you know, as senior officials and elected, we have put a significant emphasis on the Indian market.

And the reason we have done that, this is one of the fastest growing economies in the world — largest country in the world, 1.4 billion people in India — and historically a trade partner with potential but never really realized potential. And I think that you would find across Canada a view that generally that's been the case.

Any given year, and it kind of depends on the year, but all of Canada's trade with India is really a story of Saskatchewan's trade with India, because we range annually between 30 and 50 per cent of Canada's entire exports actually come from Saskatchewan.

So the economic relationship is really one that is our economic relationship with India, and we have really felt it important that we have a political relationship that is commensurate with that economic relationship, especially considering the catastrophe that the political relationship between Justin Trudeau . . . the Trudeau-Singh government has had with India.

So when Trudeau first formed government, our pea-lentil exports to India were . . . It varied annually a little bit, but it would be, you know, 4 to \$500 million annually as a part of an overall \$1 billion-plus trade relationship with India. Folks might remember Justin Trudeau's dress-up tour of India — his, really, embarrassment of the Indian government — that resulted in a significant economic impact.

What happened in the immediate aftermath of that — and it wasn't just the dress-up tour; there was a lot more that went into it than that — but we ended up with the Indian government making a decision to put a tariff onto Canadian pea and lentil imports that really made it economically impossible for there to be exports from Canada, which meant exports from Saskatchewan. So we went from \$500 million . . . Well, we went from a billion overall to 500 to zero. Thank you, Justin Trudeau.

So what did we do? We engaged. We worked very hard as a sub-national with support — with Prime Minister Harper, frankly, who has unparalleled relationships of probably anybody in the country, political relationships — to rebuild that relationship and make the case for Saskatchewan, and I think more broadly for Canada, about why pea and lentil exports from Saskatchewan were making sense for India.

So we, you know, personally met with the most senior decision makers in the Indian government, a number of their ministers, including Minister Goyal who, you know, obviously was the minister who carried the file within the Government of India, plays a very significant role in the Modi government, and who we have a very good relationship with. You know, we made the case and, you know, Minister Goyal committed to doing a review. And lo and behold, India took the tariff off, which resulted in hundreds of millions of dollars of pea and lentil exports in the very following year because of that.

Again, the benefit of having these relationships. What happened with Justin Trudeau's accusations against the Modi government . . . unproven allegations. There have yet to be any arrests. I have seen nothing substantive that has come beyond the announcement that the Prime Minister made. I can guarantee it — we would have, but for the relationship we have independently with India, seen again tariffs that would have appeared on our pea and lentil exports, which are worth hundreds of millions of dollars a year. And they did not, and in fact we have the Indian High Commissioner visiting Saskatchewan and talking about the very positive relationship with this jurisdiction. This is why we do this.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. If the minister is unable or unwilling to provide an answer to my question about vote 9, subvote 4 in the budget, I'll move on. Looking at . . .

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — The official is happy to. Yes. Yes.

The Chair: — The ministry . . . [inaudible] . . . an answer for you.

Mr. France: — Our headquarters budget for operational support is 1 million.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you.

I'd like to ask a question or two about the minimum revenue guarantee provided to WestJet as part of the agreement to establish a regular flight from Saskatoon to Minneapolis. Of the \$2.2 million budgeted per year for three years — please correct me if I'm wrong, I understood that that first year expired as of April 1 — how much of that minimum revenue guarantee was spent? And what was, another way of asking, how much was left at the end of the year?

Mr. Lynch: — Tyler Lynch, assistant deputy minister of the economic development division. The flight in general, especially for being first year of the flight, was very successful. I think the Saskatoon Airport Authority and WestJet as well were quite happy with the flight. Often these, when it's a new flight, it takes some time to grow capacity, but the results particularly in the summer were really strong to the point that WestJet is now offering that flight on a daily service rather than three times a

week as it is currently.

For the MRG [minimum revenue guarantee] to date, just over half of the MRG total was spent in this past fiscal year.

Ms. A. Young: — And do you have a dollar value associated with that?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and Assistant Deputy Minister Lynch will get that number. But maybe, by way of context, I think it's important to understand the origin and genesis of our partnership with both the Saskatoon Airport Authority and Regina Airport Authority.

I think folks who are in the province are well aware that, you know, during that COVID time period, international flights were essentially curtailed. And there was a lot of pullback on existing routes, even once you had a return to somewhat larger scale air travel, but you know, the effects are still obviously being felt by airlines. There were also significant changes that were made within the regulatory environment both in the United States and elsewhere.

But where it was really impactful was for airlines, American airlines particularly, that — given the changes in flight hours and pilot requirements — were put in a position to have to make decisions about even profitable routes or existing routes or, in the context of COVID, routes that were not profitable, how, given the limited resources or more limited resources that they had because of the FAA [federal aviation administration] rule changes, they were going to make changes in schedules and flights.

And what it resulted in is flights into Canada, not just here but across the country, being cancelled by airlines like Delta and United. And it was not because the flights were not successful or any considerations of that nature. It was really around resource allocation issues owing to regulatory changes.

So what it meant though was in this province the existing flights that we had to US hub cities were no longer there, this being a significant issue for, you know, our business community obviously — our outfitting sector I think even more specifically — which was very dependent on direct air access from cities like Minneapolis, to the point where the industry really would be in jeopardy of no longer existing but for action that would re-establish those connections.

So you know, we worked with our airport authorities who also, you know, had a significant desire to have connections into US hub cities, looked at different options, looked at different models that were used by jurisdictions elsewhere, and really, I think, jointly came to a conclusion that the MRG model was going to be a viable one for both the Saskatoon airport and the Regina airport in order to re-establish that international hub connection.

So you know, they did the negotiation. I mean we let them know we would be partners in this, but really this was incumbent on both of the airport authorities individually to work, seek out, and negotiate arrangements with partners to get to a point where that international connection would continue to exist with the US hub cities.

[17:15]

So the upshot of that were the announcements that were made with the Saskatoon Airport Authority and the Regina Airport Authority to partner with WestJet, and the relationship really on that front is with the airport authorities and the airline, not a direct relationship with government.

But we have a direct relationship with the airport authorities with an agreement as far as potential quantum that they were able to negotiate agreements with in addition to their own resources. This is not just government resources that are being utilized. The cities are a part of this and the airport authorities utilize their own resources as well. So what this has resulted in is that we have direct air access from Saskatchewan to Minneapolis, which would otherwise not be the case if the NDP [New Democratic Party] were in government and decided to cancel this, which they clearly would.

Mr. Lynch: — The value of the MRG payment for the last fiscal year is 1.2 million, up at 2.2.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. And the agreement between the government and the Saskatoon Airport Authority stipulates, and I'll quote:

Funding being provided under this agreement will be used to attract new daily direct flights from Saskatoon to Minneapolis and the SAA will waive terminal landing fees for the duration of this agreement. The minimal revenue guarantee can also be used for retaining existing direct daily US flights if necessary.

You spoke about how this is now moving to daily service. Is that daily service also covered under this agreement and could apply to the MRG?

Mr. Lynch: — Yes. So the MRG value stays the same of \$2.2 million a year. The agreement between the airport authority and government doesn't change. But for the summer flight schedule, WestJet has increased that to daily flights.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. And can you confirm for me which subvote contains the funding for both the Saskatoon Airport Authority agreement with WestJet and — I believe there's at least been an announcement — for the Regina Airport Authority? And I'm looking also to establish how much money there is and in which subvote.

Mr. Lynch: — So both the MRGs for Regina and Saskatoon would be contained within the economic development division, subvote (03).

Ms. A. Young: — And the amount budgeted this year?

Mr. Lynch: — Two million.

Ms. A. Young: — For Regina?

Mr. Lynch: — No.

Ms. A. Young: — Or for both?

Mr. Lynch: — So the total MRG budget is \$2.7 million for both airports, both Saskatoon and Regina airport authorities.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you. Thank you very much. Looking at the time, I had hoped to ask some questions about critical mineral development as an economic objective for Saskatchewan as well as some further questions about international trade and travel, but I suspect we'll have limited time remaining.

So on the question of critical mineral development, did the government or ministry conduct an economic analysis of the economic opportunities associated with the development of critical minerals in Saskatchewan? If yes, I'd love to know more about it. And if the answer is no, then I'm curious. I'd be interested in some explanation around the investments of money made if there is no clear . . . if the minister is unable to be specific about the dollar values or potential of this opportunity here in Saskatchewan.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes. No. Thanks, Madam Chair. This is an opportunity that's worth hundreds of millions of dollars for the province of Saskatchewan. It's really an exciting area as well. So I mean it's important to remember too, critical minerals encompass, by the Government of Canada's definition, 31 separate elements. Of those 31, 23 are existent in Saskatchewan, so we have an incredible opportunity in this province to be a critical mineral mining and processing hub.

And by way of direction on that, we have really worked to put in place the policy environment such that this opportunity can be realized through investment, whether that be by companies who are already here in this province or it be by companies that are looking to make new investments into the critical mineral space. NexGen is an example of that in uranium, which is obviously one of the critical minerals that we have in such healthy abundance here in Saskatchewan.

So to that end, as a part of our investment attraction strategy we put in place two new incentives that are going to work and really are quite congruent to incentives that exist in the energy . . . in the oil sector particularly, the oil and gas processing incentive. And one of the other incentives that we have modelled that on is the OGPII [oil and gas processing investment incentive] and . . .

Ms. Banks: — SPII [Saskatchewan petroleum innovation incentive].

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Oh yeah, and SPII, petroleum investment incentive. So those have been really expanded into that critical minerals space such that . . . And they have been successful in the oil space to incentivize investment into critical minerals.

In addition to that, in the midstream rare earth space . . . So of those critical minerals there are a number of different rare earth elements that can comprise critical minerals. We have made a very significant investment through the Saskatchewan Research Council into a vertically integrated midstream processing capacity. And the reason that we have done that is because we really do see an opportunity and a competitive advantage that we have in Saskatchewan in that rare earth processing space, to make this province the hub given all of our competitive advantages.

That includes workforce. That includes deep experience in the space. That includes frankly the ability to actually get a mine built, which in most parts of the world is impossible, which is why we have the second-highest ranking in the world as a jurisdiction in which to make investment in the mining space — BHP, you know, obviously being a testament to that.

So all of these advantages that we have as a jurisdiction really made sense for us to create policy frameworks to incentivize investment into critical minerals more broadly but into rare earths. And you know, this is one space where SRC really has been leading North America in.

So what that means is that we are . . . You know, just the other day, a couple of days ago I referenced it in my opening remarks. You know, one of the very first agreements the republic of France has ever signed with a sub-national jurisdiction was with Saskatchewan. And the reason for that is because of all of these advantages and the progress that's being made in critical mineral — both mining, refining, processing, and supply — as a reliable . . . from a friend.

So you know, lithium is an area where I think we have, you know, very real opportunity. I mean it's been ridiculed by the opposition as an opportunity, but it's a very real opportunity in lithium. So that is another space that we have been working in. But you know, with regard to rare earths we're very excited about that project. I talked about that a little bit in SRC estimates, but that space . . . and obviously putting in place the policy environment on critical minerals to incentivize even more investment into those industries.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much. Why has Saskatchewan not joined the regional energy and resources tables that have been set up between the provinces, the federal government, and municipalities that are under way in nine other provinces? And as a consequence, if there's no such table in Saskatchewan, how does the government propose to access federal funding for the development of rare earth minerals and their processing that other provinces are currently accessing?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Well number one, the federal government have been a partner in the rare earth project. So Minister Wilkinson and I made an announcement in, I think, December. I had met with him in London. That really kind of put the final . . . Jodi was in attendance as well. We had kind of negotiated the final outcome and made the announcement in . . . Maybe that was in January we made the announcement.

But Minister Vandal and I just made an announcement as well at SRC, and that was really focused on recovery rates of our rare earth resource. So you know, the federal government have been a part of this. Minister Champagne and I have worked through a whole different number of elements on this particular project as well, and you know, we talked about that publicly actually. Minister Champagne and Minister Duncan and I did a round table — or a fireside chat; I forget what it was — at the Sask Chamber of Commerce not that long ago and, you know, really talked about the deep relationship we had on that particular project.

So as far as accessing federal funding on the rare earth project, on the reactor development projects, I would say that, you know, significant progress has been made. I'm not sure a regional table

has . . . You know, it has nothing to do with that.

So you know, we'll leave that. That's probably Minister Reiter's question to answer in a more detailed context. But I would just say that as far as critical minerals, rare earths specifically, I think there is . . . You know, we've worked well because this is an area that has an interest for Canada, a strategic interest that goes beyond just an economic project of itself. There is a strategic significance to being a rare earth supplier for our allies around the world.

The Chair: — One last question.

Ms. A. Young: — I think I'll leave it there. Thank you. I'll leave it.

The Chair: — Okay. Having reached our agreed-upon time and seeing no more questions and consider these estimates that have been before us, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Trade and Export Development. Minister, any closing remarks?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — No. Well thank you, Madam Chair, for your work. And thank you to the committee for questions — appreciate it. And really a very special thank you to our team at Trade and Export, so our leadership group here in the room but through them our entire team at TED who work every single day to make Saskatchewan a better place and attract investment and grow our economy.

The Chair: — Okay. Ms. Young.

Ms. A. Young: — Thank you very much, Madam Chair. I'd add my appreciation again to all the officials and public servants working in the ministry here tonight as well as behind the scenes, as well as appreciation to yourself, my fellow committee members, Clerks-at-the-Table, good folks at Hansard and broadcast services, as well as everyone deeply engaged watching at home. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you. We will now take a recess till 6:30.

[The committee recessed from 17:29 until 18:30.]

**General Revenue Fund
Innovation Saskatchewan
Vote 84**

Subvote (IS01)

The Chair: — All right. Welcome back, committee members. We are now into consideration for vote 84, Innovation Saskatchewan, subvote (IS01).

Minister Harrison is here with his officials. And if the officials could introduce themselves and state their position the first time they speak at the mike, that would be appreciated, and Hansard will turn the mike on for you. So, Minister, you can begin introducing your officials and with any opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure. Well thanks very much, Madam Chair. And thanks to committee members for being here this evening as well. We are pleased to be here for estimates 2024-25

Innovation Saskatchewan.

Officials: Kari Harvey, I think all know, chief executive officer of Innovation Saskatchewan on my right; Brent Sukenik, our vice-president of corporate strategy and services on the left; Avery Vold, our vice-president of economic development and research investments, behind; Kelley Moore, vice-president, research and technology park operations, behind as well; Dani Wawryk, our executive director of communications and marketing, also behind us.

Innovation Saskatchewan was established nearly 15 years ago as the central agency responsible for advancing the Government of Saskatchewan's innovation priorities. In 2022 the government introduced *The Innovation Saskatchewan Amendment Act* to create a single integrated innovation agency. The legislation moved the Innovation Place research and technology parks under the authority and management of Innovation Saskatchewan.

The changes allowed for the agency to enhance support for the province's innovation ecosystem with a robust portfolio unlike any other in the country. Innovation Saskatchewan continues to focus on its four strategic goals to ensure growth and success: (1) ensuring funded research institutes are creating economic impacts and are aligned with Saskatchewan's research and development priorities; (2) building and supporting a sustainable and inclusive technology sector; (3) focusing resources into areas of strategic advantage and opportunity such as ag tech and cleantech to position Saskatchewan as a world-class innovation hub; and (4) making Saskatchewan the preferred destination for local, national, and international researchers, entrepreneurs, and tech companies.

The agency has become an economic driver and unparalleled supporter of our innovation ecosystem bolstering the province's reputation as a global innovation leader. This support ensures that great ideas can grow here. As the global innovation ecosystem continues to change, the agency has evolved with it.

This fiscal year, Innovation Saskatchewan will receive a budget of 31.042 million, an 8.1 per cent increase from the '23-24 budget. Its strategic priorities remain the same and involve attracting, retaining, and growing the province's technology sector and supporting the commercialization of game-changing research. Park operations will also continue to self-fund maintenance capital projects through its own-source revenue.

The budget includes two initiatives that will expand support for key innovation industries. The first is planning for the redevelopment of the flagship building at the research and technology park in Saskatoon, aided by an additional \$2.42 million in capital appropriation. The west wing of the Galleria building was home to a single tenant for over 30 years. Now there's an opportunity to harness the building's potential and activate it in alignment with our province's economic goals and sector priorities. This 44,000-square-foot versatile space can house five to eight scaling ag tech companies that will have access to specialized infrastructure, including multi-use occupancy space and laboratories.

This redevelopment project addresses two key issues for ag start-ups: the lack of a specialized infrastructure available for smaller companies and the longer timelines required for ag start-ups to

get product to market. This will give them access to high-demand space in a low-risk environment with connection to the flourishing agriculture community at the park. With this significant infrastructure investment, Innovation Saskatchewan will further the high growth trajectory of ag tech companies and the province will benefit from the positive economic impact.

The parks in Regina and Saskatoon are epicentres of innovation, home to groundbreaking companies, and surrounded by key research institutes like the Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization. The parks have demonstrated their ability to support more economic diversification within our province. More than 200 technology companies have started their businesses at the park over the past three decades, and nearly 60 per cent of them are still operating.

The parks work in alignment with the agency's existing programs and investments to help de-risk research and development and support companies. For example, Lucent BioSciences received support from Canada's largest ag tech venture capital fund, Emmertech, which Innovation Saskatchewan committed a 15 million anchor investment. The support helped Lucent BioSciences create a new \$19 million manufacturing plant in Rosetown, which opened last October and created 15 direct jobs and moved all production previously done in BC [British Columbia] to Prairie Agricultural Machinery Institute in Melfort, which will move into the Rosetown production facility upon its completion.

As the Lucent BioSciences team sets up its manufacturing plant, it has also been expanding its footprint in the Saskatoon research and technology park. Lucent BioSciences moved to Saskatchewan because of great partners, a friendly business environment, and the Emmertech investment. They stayed because of its superior infrastructure, flexible leasing, and its strong innovation ecosystem.

The second key initiative in this fiscal year is the expansion of the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive. Innovation Saskatchewan is doubling the annual tax credit cap from \$3.5 million to \$7 million and expanding eligibility to include cleantech companies.

Launched in 2018, STSI [Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive] provides a non-refundable 45 per cent tax credit to individuals, corporations, and venture capital funds that invest in eligible start-up companies. More than \$90 million in private investment has been attracted to the province through the Saskatchewan technology start-up incentive. The province's investor pool has increased by 376 investors, 60 per cent new to angel investment, and more than 400 jobs among 100 eligible start-ups have been created.

The STSI enhancements were announced last month as a key part of Saskatchewan's new investment attraction strategy titled *Securing the Next Decade of Growth*. It is among the most aggressive angel investment tax incentives in the entire country. By expanding the cap in the eligibility, STSI is advancing Saskatchewan's competitive edge and incentivizing investment in Saskatchewan-based technology companies.

STSI's inclusion of cleantech start-ups aligns with the province's commitment to sustainability and competitiveness within its

resource sectors and is already positively impacting this sector. For example, Regina-based company Prairie Clean Energy has become a bioenergy leader in Saskatchewan's ag tech and cleantech sectors for its environmentally sustainable solution to agricultural waste. In fall 2022, Prairie Clean Energy received \$180,000 in funding from Innovation Saskatchewan's Agtech Growth Fund, and now it's been approved for the STSI program as one of the first cleantech companies, which CEO Mark Cooper says has come at exactly the right time.

These developments build upon the incredible success Innovation Saskatchewan's core programs have all had since its inception. The agency is allocating \$1 million each to the Saskatchewan Advantage Innovation Fund or SAIF and to the Agtech Growth Fund. These are dual research and development grant programs that accelerate the commercialization of game-changing technologies in agriculture, mining, energy, manufacturing, and health care and help bring them to market.

The initial investments by Innovation Saskatchewan have returned exponentially within our provincial economy as companies stay, grow, and build their technologies and collaborate with industry right here. Precision AI, a Regina-based company and international rising star in precision agriculture, received crucial early investments from the Agtech Growth Fund, which has led to exponential growth of the company and advancement in technologies that impact our agricultural industry.

Innovation Saskatchewan is allocating \$100,000 between the made-in-Saskatchewan technology, or MIST, and the Innovation Challenge, two programs that aim to address public sector challenges with local, innovative solutions. And in this year \$2.89 million will continue to be allocated to the Innovation and Science Fund, which matches federal funding for research projects at Saskatchewan universities, colleges, and research institutes.

Madam Chair, in addition to financial support programs, Innovation Saskatchewan will also continue to support the community helping to build strong foundations in the province's innovation ecosystem with the following commitments: \$375,000 to Co.Labs, Saskatchewan's first technology incubator, to continue fuelling growth for Saskatchewan start-ups.

Co.Labs continues to build on its success. This year alone it has created 120 jobs through start-ups in the program, \$7.2 million in investments, and 19.4 million in combined revenue, beating last year's record of 13.2 million. Since its launch in 2017, Co.Labs has incubated 201 start-ups who have produced 812 jobs and generated \$60.7 million in revenue. Its stream of programming has provided crucial support to founders and been a game changer for the province.

Innovation Saskatchewan has also committed 400,000 to the technology ecosystem program which supports programs and initiatives that advance tech sector growth. For example, through this program, Innovation Saskatchewan supports Startup TNT, an organization that connects angel investors with tech entrepreneurs to foster early-stage investments in the tech sector through its investment summits. With support from Innovation Saskatchewan, it's raised more than \$3 million for 24 of Saskatchewan's start-up companies.

Innovation Saskatchewan also supports Cultivator's Agtech Accelerator. This accelerator supports early-stage ag tech start-ups in Saskatchewan. With two cohorts completed, it's raised over \$83 million in private capital across its 32 companies. Cohort 3 is now under way.

And finally, Innovation Saskatchewan will also continue investing \$3 million in Canada's largest ag tech venture capital fund, Emmertech. This was part of the \$15 million commitment announced in 2020 to invest 3 million per year over five years in the fund managed by Conexus Credit Union to ensure ag tech start-ups in Saskatchewan continue scaling and growing.

Innovation Saskatchewan also plays a key role in supporting and advancing our research community by funding six of the major institutions that make up Saskatchewan's world-class research infrastructure. The agency will continue its core operational funding of \$4.149 million to VIDO [Vaccine and Infectious Disease Organization]. This funding, in addition to our previously announced \$15 million, will support the establishment of Canada's Centre for Pandemic Research in Saskatoon.

Construction began in February and renovations are projected to be completed in the following year. The centre already includes a vaccine manufacturing facility, which opened in June 2022. This manufacturing facility will soon be able to produce 40 million doses of human and animal vaccines per year. The centre will also include a new facility capable of housing a wider range of animals and will expand pre-clinical research and development capacity as well.

With the level 4 containment capacity VIDO will become only the second laboratory after the Winnipeg lab capable of working with the most dangerous pathogens, an incredible feat for our province. These important enhancements will attract new talent, develop the next generation of scientists, and support researchers and make Saskatchewan a leader in vaccine research and development.

Innovation Saskatchewan will allocate \$2.5 million to the Sylvia Fedoruk Canadian Centre for Nuclear Innovation. The Fedoruk Centre operates the Saskatchewan Cyclotron Facility, and since 2016 it has had an incredible impact on the Saskatchewan population.

Ten years ago PET [positron emission tomography], PET scanning for cancer diagnoses wasn't available in the province. In this past year alone the Royal University Hospital has performed PET/CT [positron emission tomography/computerized tomography] scans for clinical diagnoses of 3,240 patients, with isotopes delivered from the Saskatchewan Cyclotron Facility. This is a 20 per cent increase over the previous fiscal year, where 2,691 patients received PET/CT scans.

In July 2023 the Canadian Nuclear Laboratories announced an agreement with the Fedoruk Centre. This significantly increased the global supply of actinium-225, a rare medical isotope and groundbreaking weapon in the fight against cancer. At its Saskatchewan Cyclotron Facility, the Fedoruk Centre will play a critical role in the supply chain of this nuclear innovation, which will aid in the development of many promising new cancer

treatments.

[18:45]

Additional funding commitments include the following: \$4.1 million for the Canadian Light Source, a major national science facility and home to the only synchrotron in Canada — since 2005, CLS [Canadian Light Source Inc.] has enabled more than 5,000 scientists from 56 Canadian academic institutions and 45 countries to make groundbreaking discoveries and advancements in science; 1.675 million for the Petroleum Technology Research Centre which provides project management and funding support for research into enhanced oil recovery and carbon storage, including its Aquistore facility near Estevan; \$256,000 for the industry-led International Minerals Innovation Institute to support digital mining transformation; and finally, \$4.849 million for the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation which allocates funding to high-impact and peer-reviewed health research relevant to the people of the province.

By maintaining funding levels to research institutions, Innovation Saskatchewan is supporting world-class researchers, infrastructure, and community, and advancing the province's research capacity, economy, and global competitiveness.

In closing, in 2024-25 the agency will expand on its strong foundations to extend support for Saskatchewan's innovation ecosystem and continue to champion the Saskatchewan advantage as the province strives to be the best place to develop a technology company and undertake advanced research to solve global challenges. The government is proud Innovation Saskatchewan is leading this mission and of the work it has done to strengthen Saskatchewan's core sectors, as well as advancing innovation opportunities in support of our growth plan.

This concludes my opening remarks and I look forward to questions from the committee. Thank you.

The Chair: — Thank you, Minister. Before I open the floor to questions, I just want to note change to committee members this evening. We have, sitting in for Aleana Young, Noor Burki; and in for Jennifer Bowes is Ms. Betty Nippi-Albright. All right. I'll open the floor to questions from committee members and recognize Ms. Nippi-Albright.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Miigwech, Madam Chair. Thank you for the presentation. It's always interesting to hear what's happening with Innovation Saskatchewan and always good to hear the wonderful things that are being done.

But before I get into the questions, I just wanted to kind of address something that just happened just before we started the meeting, and I wasn't sure what the intent was behind the comment that was made about our chits, chits sheets by the Madam Chair, stating that she wasn't sure if my colleague from Regina Coronation Park and I understood what the meaning was, what we understood the questions regarding the chits sheets. So I'm not sure what was implied as we both are pretty good at English, understanding English.

So I'm not sure what that was. I just wanted to enter that here on record just before the meeting started, whether that . . . we have been . . . We understand what chit sheets are and we have a good

grasp of the English language. So I'm not sure what that was, so I just wanted to enter that. And so I'll start out with some questions.

The Chair: — Can I answer you, Ms. Nippi-Albright? There was no implication made. Noor gave us a sheet for someone that you gave the same sheet for, so that's why my comment is that we needed to get the right ones. It wasn't that I was implying anything, that you didn't understand. It's just that we had two sheets for the same person.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — No, what I heard was precisely, "I don't think they understand." So that was fine. Anyway, we'll move on.

But I just wanted to get back with the Innovation Saskatchewan here. It's always, like I said, interesting to hear the innovation that's happening here in Saskatchewan. Because of the time and the amount of time that we have, what I really would like to know more about is this, the exciting, what I think is exciting is the Saskatchewan Technology Fund and how that . . . The mandate, of course, is developing policies and programs and conducting activities, etc. But I'm interested in more, hearing more about kind of, is there a board for the agency and who are the members on the board? And just the difference between the administration or the advisors. I wasn't quite sure on that, so if you could share with that.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I appreciate it. It's a good question. It is, and I think you've hit on . . . It's a bit of a complicated answer. So really the Ministry of Environment kind of managed the policy and of the program. It's one where Innovation Saskatchewan really is the administrator, but we don't do the policy part of it.

So I was going to ask maybe Kari to expand a bit more on that, because it is a good question and it deserves a more fulsome answer. So go ahead, Kari.

Ms. Harvey: — Hi. Kari Harvey, CEO of Innovation Saskatchewan getting in. So yeah, as the minister mentioned, you know, our role in relation to the technology fund is really just to help with the administration, sort of the back-office work, the accounting. So we are running the intake.

I can give a little bit of an overview of sort of what's transpired to date. In September of this year the call for expressions of interest was announced. From there the invitations for full proposals were sent in February of 2024. We're really just going to be entering the review period for the proposals and then decisions around, you know, which projects will be selected will happen at a later date. So essentially, you know, we ensure that there is, that the proposals or the expressions of interest and the applications meet the criteria that's laid out as well as ensure that there is some technical evaluation.

But essentially all, you know, all the policy decisions and sort of how the governance of the fund is managed would be the responsibility of the Ministry of Environment.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. I just want to jump right in and ask because this is very interesting for me. But before that I should have just kind of took a little . . . started a little rather than

just going right in there.

So the intent of this fund again, remind me. I kind of named a little bit about it, but just kind of the intent of the . . . What's the intent of the fund?

Ms. Harvey: — Of the technology fund?

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Yes.

Ms. Harvey: — So the intent of the technology fund, it's really a compliance option for what are considered heavy emitter organizations. And so as a way to meet their requirements in terms of GHG emissions, they have the option of contributing to the fund, which then, those funds are pooled. And there's an application process for companies to essentially put together proposals to access that funding to incorporate innovations in their operations to help them to reduce their GHG emissions.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — I was like, okay I'm . . . I was following the line, so thank you. You just confirmed what I was already thinking.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. And no, good question. And really, just kind of by way of background, so Environment really manages the policy end of it. But the reason why we are involved is because of the history and experience that we have in administering application-based programs. So whether that's the advantage for innovation fund, you know, there's a whole host of them. I referenced a number of them in my opening remarks. But that's really why Innovation Saskatchewan is the agency that does the administration. And really that is kind of our role in it, and it's because we have experience and expertise in doing the administration component for application-based programming.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So for the expressions of interest that have already been submitted, the proposals from February 2024, so how many were submitted? Do you have an idea of how many?

Ms. Harvey: — Yes, so 20 expressions of interest were received.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — And do those, out of those proposals do you have . . . You've talked about having a criteria. Is there a kind of a — what's the word I'm looking for — a percentage that goes to different criteria funding streams?

Ms. Harvey: — So in terms of the expression of interest, it's really . . . like the first cut really is about just, you know, some fairly limited questions around, you know, are they actually a regulated emitter, yes or no? Like that's kind of the level of criteria that's used. You know, are they based in Saskatchewan, yes or no? Like that kind of thing.

When we get to the full evaluation of the actual proposals, that's when there is a weighting that's assigned to various criteria. But that's more of a policy-related question that Environment would be responsible for, for working through with their advisory committee and their governance process.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So just with that, so help me understand how . . . so Innovation Saskatchewan, how you work with the Ministry of Environment in relation to that. Follow up that with

that question.

Ms. Harvey: — So just to be, I guess, more specific in terms of what our role is, so we are responsible for basically managing the application process and intake periods. We do the initial screening of the applications, which I spoke to earlier in terms of that criteria. We would communicate with the applicants about the status of their expression of interest and their proposal. We'll administer any agreements with the successful applicants once those decisions are made. And we are responsible for general accounting of the fund which includes invoicing and tracking of compliance payments. So that's essentially our role.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Good. So how many, like, I guess what are the sources of funding besides those that are the biggest emitters? Who else funds, do the funds . . . [inaudible].

Ms. Harvey: — The technology fund is completely funded through the heavy emitters putting in their compliance payments.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. And does it vary from year to year of how much is brought in?

Ms. Harvey: — Correct.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So was there an increase or decrease from last fiscal year to this year?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, it just started last year, and there's an estimated 25 million available in the fund right now. But that is projected or it could be projected to be much higher, just depending on, you know, what the choices are of the companies in terms of that as an option.

[19:00]

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. So who makes the recommendations for the funding in relation to this fund?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, that's the advisory committee.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Advisory?

Ms. Harvey: — Yes. Like and I think this is more of a governance question as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Yeah. It is. So the advisory . . . You make the recommendation which goes to . . . I'm just a little bit confused here. I know there's that relationship you have with the Ministry of Environment, so I'm like, who . . . Because you're not doing the policy piece, you're doing the administration piece. So at what point do you, I guess, sit down then and chat about who does what when it gets grey?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so in terms of the decision-making process, that would be something that probably should be deferred to the Ministry of Environment. What I would say is that there is processes in place and different levels of decision making that will happen, but those decisions are all managed through the Ministry of Environment.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. So just to help me understand, I get the, kind of the complexity of, well kind of, the roles of what

you do and then, where, at what point I guess . . . Give me an example of what would be just a decision you make, and then what would go directly to the Ministry of Environment.

Ms. Harvey: — So after the . . . So the decisions that we would make would be around the expressions of interest. When the full proposals are completed, at that point when those are reviewed, those would go to the Ministry of Environment, go through their decision-making processes. They do have like various committees set up, and they would probably be in a better position to explain sort of how those will play out in terms of those decision makings.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — No, that's good. Thank you for that. So, Minister, you spoke briefly — I thought I heard you say — briefly about the technical review committee. Can you . . . And how does Innovation Saskatchewan relate to it? I believe you did say that, unless I read it here somewhere.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so essentially the technical subcommittee is maybe a bit of a misnomer. The subcommittee is not . . . We actually have an agreement, or we're in the process of establishing an agreement with a third-party provider that will do the actual technical assessments because we need to have individuals that have, you know, engineering expertise, that can do calculations around GHG emissions, those sorts of things.

So that is the, that would be . . . And we are responsible for that, and we'll be responsible for that agreement and working with that third-party provider. So we're just, we haven't signed an agreement yet. We're just in the process of signing that agreement and then once that technical agreement is completed, then that's when it would go to the decision-making group that Environment is responsible for.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Thank you. And also, so do you have a dollar figure that's allocated just for that or is that like just in the budget? Is there that piece? Because I've read in here to try and get a better understanding. I thought okay, I know that you have dollars for experts that you need along the way. So how much of the budget is allocated for that expertise that you may need?

Ms. Harvey: — Yes. So the way the program is set out and the way that the Act is written is that there is up to 5 per cent of the fund value can be used for administration. But what I would say is that we are far beneath what that amount is. We have an MOU that basically outlines, you know, what costs will be reimbursed and that total amount. If you just give me one second, I'll just . . .

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Yeah, sure, verify that.

Ms. Harvey: — So it will actually be based on what's actually utilized, but we're estimating about 280,000 in total is what would be required to conduct the technical reviews.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. Well thank you. So for the number of approved projects, it says it will be based on available funds. So looking at the . . . And I again could be going and asking questions as it relates to Environment so correct me if I'm going there. So just with the dollars, the budget, so of the proposals that have been submitted, do you kind of have an idea of what you would expect would be funded based on your budget?

Ms. Harvey: — Are you . . . Sorry, just to clarify. Are you looking for the total value, estimated total value of the projects that have been submitted versus what's available?

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Yes, yes.

Ms. Harvey: — Okay. Well what we do know is the total value thus far does exceed, the value of the projects does exceed the value of the fund at this point. I believe it's 51 million is the total value of what's been requested in terms of the overall value of projects. And as I mentioned, there's 25 million in the fund right now.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. Okay, I'm just trying to remember I only have an hour. So just in the annual report for the fund for 2022-2023 there was a revenue of 29 million and no expenses reported. Could you provide the current revenue and expenses?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so that would be a question for the Ministry of Environment to answer. That ministry is the one that actually collects the compliance payments, so they would be doing the processing. And what we know right now is no compliance payments have come in for this year, but they would be in a better position to be able to provide you with projections or even, you know, what their understanding is of what to expect for compliance payments, for future payments.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — I know that you've said that this was a new, relatively new fund. You know, it started last year or something. You were saying that. So from last year, and I don't know if this is something I can ask, but I'll ask anyway. You can tell me if it's not. Okay. But could you provide a list of the projects that have been approved and rejected from last year?

Ms. Harvey: — The first intake period has just happened this year.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Oh, okay.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, so there were no projects approved last year.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. So is there like a projected time that you'll find out who's approved, or is that just with Ministry of Environment? They would.

Ms. Harvey: — In terms of the time frame, at this point we're expecting sometime in the fall is when decisions will be made around the project funding.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay, so in 2023 the price for emissions was set at 65 per tonne of carbon dioxide equivalent, a \$15-per-tonne increase over 2022. What is the current rate? And how is this rate determined?

Ms. Harvey: — That would be . . . Yeah, that's a question for the Ministry of Environment.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. Thank you. No, thought I'd ask.

Ms. Harvey: — They're the ones that would do those calculations, yeah.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Yeah. That's good. You know, we talked about the . . . I wasn't sure. I may have missed the makeup of the committee or this group that . . . with this fund. Remind me again who is on the committee.

Ms. Harvey: — So the Ministry of Environment has set up an industry advisory committee that has been working with the ministry and ourselves over the course of development of the fund. The scope, the criteria, all of that has been worked on with the industry members.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So remind me again. I read, I believe it's in the document, that you had two members from industry. Is that correct?

Ms. Harvey: — No there's . . . On the advisory committee?

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — That's on the advisory, okay.

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah. No, there would be, I'm not sure, but there's more than two members. So about seven, seven members or so. But they're all industry representatives. But the Ministry of Environment is really the one managing the advisory committee.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So just to kind of take it kind of totally in a different area, and just for my own interest, I know that Indigenous people like to be involved in the economic reconciliation. So have you and is there ever an interest I guess to ensure that Indigenous, whether it's elders, knowledge keepers, would they be engaged, or is there an intent to engage them down the road as an advisory or part of the committee?

Ms. Harvey: — That again would be the Ministry of Environment that that question would be best posed to because they're the ones responsible for setting up the governance, bringing on, you know, those . . . or establishing criteria, leading those discussions with industry members.

[19:15]

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — So just kind of back to this particular fund that I've just been talking about here. So what I'm hearing you say — correct me if I'm wrong — is all that you . . . Innovation Saskatchewan has no say in the makeup of the board or committee; it's Ministry of Environment. Is that what you're saying?

Ms. Harvey: — Correct.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. So is there a desire or an intention for Innovation to advise or recommend that engagement of knowledge keepers be part of the makeup of the organization? Is that something that you guys would be thinking of going down?

Ms. Harvey: — Yeah, we can certainly bring that. You know, I think it's a really good point, and I think that that's something we can bring back as part of our discussions with Ministry of Environment officials and the advisory committee as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Okay. So this fund, again when I was reading, this fund is for the output-based performance standards, right? And not the other piece, which is Environment. Is that

correct?

Ms. Harvey: — The output-based performance standards, that is Environment. Yeah, they're responsible for that.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Oh sorry. I just went ahead of myself here. So here, I just read in here, the funds obtain funding from two principal sources. Of course is the compliance payments from regulated emitters, right. And then the second one is the penalty payments, which is entirely with the Ministry of Environment. So this piece that you're talking about is the OBPS [output-based performance standards] program. Is that correct?

Ms. Harvey: — Correct. The other stream that you're speaking to — the penalty payments — that's actually Ministry of Energy and Resources.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — You're right. You're right. Yeah, it's down here. Okay. So in terms of economic reconciliation and Innovation Saskatchewan, is there a plan of moving forward and inviting inherent and treaty rights holders, stakeholders in being part of Innovation Saskatchewan?

Ms. Harvey: — So what I could say about that is, you know, I think that we really do see the importance of ensuring that our Indigenous communities are included and part of the technology sector. I mean, you know, from a perspective of I guess percentage of participation in the workforce currently, what we see nationally is that Indigenous people make up only 2 per cent of the technology sector. In Saskatchewan it's a little bit higher at 7 per cent in Saskatchewan, but we know that's still not, you know, that's still not where it needs to be.

It's definitely a complex issue in terms of how do we best encourage participation and engagement in the sector. And it really starts downstream from an education, you know, education of youth, encouraging and creating excitement around STEM [science, technology, engineering, and math] in science and technology. And so really our role . . . And just to add to that, you know, it's not Innovation Saskatchewan's sole responsibility. There's a number of other partners and groups that would, you know, have a role in helping to ensure that we have better results in terms of participation.

So what we tend to do is look at that ecosystem development. We have a fund I think the minister would have mentioned in his remarks called our ecosystem development fund, and we target initiatives that will help to advance certain priorities, you know, in that space. And so we've tended to really focus on events or initiatives that will support youth and expose youth to STEM.

So we have, for example, we funded — I think we talked about this last year — the RoboX program which we think was extremely successful because not only from the time when we supported that program where it kind of . . . What we saw happen was that the organization that's delivering the program, which is the Saskatchewan Industry Education Council, they were able to secure federal funding through CanCode to expand the program even further. And they have been actually quite successful in even further expanding that program to now include an MOU with FSIN [Federation of Sovereign Indigenous Nations] to ensure that the 74 First Nations have access to these robotic kits.

And some of the stats to date are that SIEC [Saskatoon Industry Education Council] has trained 3,425 teachers; they've impacted over 66,000 students and 10,000 Indigenous students. And so we're seeing some really good results from that program.

And we also have provided direct funding to STEM summer camps where we provided 42,000 for Educating Youth in Engineering & Science program, which was a week-long STEM program.

And so from Innovation Saskatchewan's perspective, that's where we've really been focusing our efforts in really trying to create that downstream development and excitement around and the opportunities that the tech sector offers. You know, some of the highest-paying jobs are in the tech sector. I think it's over 75,000 is the average income for jobs in the technology sector. But even more than that, the opportunity for entrepreneurship and developing, you know, start-up companies.

So that's really where we've focused, but some of our funded institutes as well are also looking at ways to engage Indigenous communities in their programs as well.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — Well thank you. I actually had a friend of mine who's a teacher who taught one of those robotics courses to the students. So when he was telling me about it, I was like, hey, this is Innovation. So it has been good.

So I'm just cognizant of the time here, and I'm sure I have one question. So my question, this final question is going to be around the 94 Calls to Action. We know that it's been, you know, since the 94 Calls to Action and the Truth and Reconciliation committee made the 94 Calls to Action, the onus has been on businesses, organizations, governments, all levels of government to look at incorporating relevant 94 Calls to Action. So with Innovation Saskatchewan, where if any of the 94 Calls to Action do you see Innovation Saskatchewan embracing and also implementing?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I appreciate the question; I really do. And so I'll maybe start with a bit of a high level statement. Again, cognizant, I know we only have a few minutes left. Appreciate the questions overall though.

You know, we've had a chance to talk about it a little bit in some of the other estimates that we've done, but really, you know, we are committed to finding ways within, whether it be Innovation Saskatchewan, whether it be through Saskatchewan Research Council, whether it be through Trade and Export, Immigration and Career Training, other ministries across government.

I can't speak for all of the other, but I know from where I sit and, you know, have the honour of being responsible for, we really, from the very top through our entire senior management team, are looking for every opportunity that we can find to work with First Nation — whether it be First Nation governments, with First Nation companies, with tribal organizations as far as companies if they're community development corps — to find ways that we can partner, and find ways that we can really, in a meaningful way, create opportunity for Indigenous people.

And you know, the Calls to Action I would say, you know, they're obviously much more specific than that sort of broad

statement, but I think really what they add up to is a statement as far as economic reconciliation that kind of gets to that point. So that's something that really goes to the heart of what we try and do. And that's true for Innovation Saskatchewan as it is across the other departments that I have the honour of being responsible for. So I'm not sure, Kari, if you want to add anything, but feel free.

Ms. Harvey: — The only thing that I would add to that is as I mentioned, I mean we also, with all of our funded institutes by extension, we do have those discussions at board level around how do we ensure that we are looking at those Calls to Action and ensuring that we have initiatives that advance, you know, our efforts in that area.

But I would also just mention that the other thing that we are doing is just as an organization ensuring that our own staff understand what the Calls to Action are. It's a part of our training, our mandatory training when we have new staff come on board. And so just by creating that understanding so that there's that lens that we are all looking through as we do our work, you know, in the organization.

The Chair: — All right. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for Innovation Saskatchewan. And, Minister, if you have some closing remarks you'd like to make.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Just very briefly. Thank you very much for the questions, good questions and good discussion. And I want to thank as well, through our senior leadership team here, thank you to all of you, but through you to our entire team in Innovation Saskatchewan for the work you do every day. Appreciate it.

The Chair: — Ms. Nippi-Albright, if you have some closing remarks you'd like to make.

Ms. Nippi-Albright: — I just want to say thank you so much for taking the time to answer my questions. And it's always so interesting to hear about what Innovation Saskatchewan is doing, and in particular for our young people out in the community. So thank you again for taking your time to answer my questions. Thank you.

The Chair: — All right. We'll just take a brief recess to change officials and committee members if need be.

[The committee recessed for a period of time.]

[19:30]

**General Revenue Fund
Immigration and Career Training
Vote 89**

Subvote (IC01)

The Chair: — All right, welcome back, committee members and minister. Next on our agenda this evening is consideration of the estimates of the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. We will now consider vote 89, Immigration and Career Training,

central management and services, subvote (IC01).

Minister Harrison, if you want to introduce the officials that have joined you here. And I ask that the first time officials speak at the mike they say their name and their position as well, and Hansard will turn on the mikes for you. So, Minister, begin with your introductions and your opening remarks.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Great. Well thank you very much, Madam Chair. I appreciate it. And again, thanks to members of the committee for being here this evening. It's appreciated, and I look forward to the discussion. And I am pleased to be here today to discuss the priorities and investments the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training is advancing in this budget year 2024-25.

To my right, Deputy Minister Richelle Bourgoin. I think everybody knows Richelle from previous appearances before committee. Assistant deputy minister behind me, Darcy Smycniuk; assistant deputy minister Christa Ross to my left; and three of our executive directors: Reegan Obst, Jennifer Clark, and Anne McRorie, who are joining us as well.

The ministry's mandate is to build a strong and resilient labour market by addressing employer workforce needs, training people for jobs, and supporting newcomers to work and stay in Saskatchewan. In 2024-25 we're achieving this by making a series of strategic and innovative investments in programs and services that build and develop Saskatchewan's labour force. This year's budget features \$160.54 million in total expenditures.

A strong workforce is the foundation of the economy. Last year, capital investment in Saskatchewan increased by more than 25 per cent to \$17 billion. This investment is growing our industries and creating thousands of jobs.

Recently released data from Statistics Canada shows that in the final quarter of 2023 Saskatchewan had the highest job vacancy rate amongst the provinces with 21,800 job vacancies. Saskatchewan needs to ensure we have the labour force to meet this demand, or we risk limiting and capping our growth.

We're already seeing the impact of our efforts. Saskatchewan's labour force is growing. The latest labour force statistics released earlier this month showed the province added 10,500 full-time jobs in March 2024 over March 2023. And with an unemployment rate that is consistently well below the national average, Saskatchewan continues to demonstrate our economic strength. In March 2024 Saskatchewan's labour force also set several record highs for the month, including for labour force employment and female and male employment.

This growth is exactly what Immigration and Career Training, or ICT, is supporting with this year's budget. In 2024-25 the ministry will invest in programs that are not only designed to meet Saskatchewan's current labour force needs but our future needs as well. We know Saskatchewan has a bright future, and our government is looking forward, looking ahead to ensure the province's workforce is prepared to meet the evolving needs of industry. As our economy grows we want to make sure it translates to an excellent quality of life for Saskatchewan people.

In addition to supporting Saskatchewan's growth plan goals of

adding 100,000 jobs and growing the population to 1.4 million by 2030, ICT's 2024-25 budget also supports the recently released Saskatchewan labour market strategy. This strategy is a road map to ensuring Saskatchewan is able to meet the demands of our economy. The strategy directly supports the province's investment attraction strategy, which outlines how the province is increasing investment and further advancing Saskatchewan's growth plan goal of \$16 billion in private capital investment annually. This investment drives Saskatchewan's growth, creating jobs and growing our economy and creating a better quality of life for Saskatchewan people. However, for Saskatchewan to attract private investment, we need to have the labour force to support that growth, which is why the labour market strategy is critical to that endeavour.

The labour market strategy has three pillars: connecting Saskatchewan people to jobs, recognizing skills in Saskatchewan, and international recruitment.

Connecting people to jobs means giving Saskatchewan people the first opportunity to benefit from our growing economy. To do that we need to ensure we have the skills and knowledge employers need.

In 2024-25 the budget includes several investments for skills training programs and services for unemployed and underemployed people, including \$24 million for adult essential skills training, which provides the foundational skills that are needed to enter the workforce such as literacy, numeracy, and workplace writing as skills. This training provides an essential foot in the door, enabling people to take their first step into employment.

Twenty-three million dollars for pre-employment programs and services which provide learners with the basic skills and knowledge they need to begin applying for jobs, enabling people to overcome some of the initial barriers to employment.

Nearly \$22 million for credentialed skills training programs delivered through post-secondary institutions which prepare people for jobs in fields such as construction, health care, energy and manufacturing, tourism and agriculture, and many more. Through these programs people are able to directly enter into in-demand jobs in sectors across the province.

And lastly, the 2024-25 budget includes nearly \$10 million to support employment programming for people with disabilities, which ensures our labour force is inclusive and that we're providing all Saskatchewan people with the opportunities they need to find meaningful employment.

The labour market strategy outlines how the province is investing in programs that address in-demand occupations. As the province continues to grow, the demand for workers in the construction skilled trades is on the rise. From carpenters to electricians to plumbers to welders, jobs in this sector are building the infrastructure the province needs to support continued growth. To support the increased demand for skilled trades the province is increasing our investment into the Saskatchewan Apprenticeship and Trade Certification Commission, or SATCC, by \$1.5 million to add 250 apprentice training seats for construction-related trades, including electrician, plumbing, and welding. This brings the total investment in apprenticeship

training to nearly \$23 million. It will increase the total number of training seats to 4,850.

This year's budget also includes programming specifically aimed at Indigenous people and those living in Saskatchewan's North to connect to jobs in their own communities. Northern Saskatchewan is rich in natural resources and economic potential. The ministry is working in partnership with employers, training institutions, and First Nations and Métis agencies to ensure northerners have the opportunity to get the skills and access the training they need to work in these important industries. For example, this year the province is providing \$400,000 to the First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence to further develop the Indigenous workforce in the natural resource industry.

Partnerships with organizations like the First Nations Natural Resource Centre of Excellence, with the first-hand knowledge of both the industry and Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan, enable the ministry to maximize our investments and grow the workforce Saskatchewan needs, while also ensuring it is inclusive of everyone.

The second pillar of the labour market strategy is recognizing skills that are already in Saskatchewan. Every year through the Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program and other newcomer pathways, people come to this province with skills, knowledge, and credentials to contribute to our economy. But many face challenges in getting those credentials recognized, stopping them from working in the field in which they have been trained.

It's unacceptable to have internationally trained health care workers, tradespeople, engineers, other professionals unable to work in their profession, which is why in 2024-25 Immigration and Career Training is investing more than \$850,000 to fully implement the Saskatchewan credential recognition service to support individuals with out-of-province or international credentials cut through the red tape and get to work. We're offering one-on-one support to people and helping them navigate licensure pathways. Through this service, the province will also be working proactively with regulatory bodies to streamline pathways for credential recognition in Saskatchewan.

Saskatchewan has one of the most aggressive credential recognition services in Canada — frankly, I think it's the only credential recognition service in Canada — putting in place strict timelines for regulatory bodies to respond to credential recognition applications. And by investing further into this service, we're making working in Saskatchewan even more appealing and accessible.

The final pillar of the labour market strategy is international recruitment. When employers are no longer able to find the labour force they need in Saskatchewan, the province is supporting them to look beyond our province and find the talent they need. This year's budget includes an additional \$856,000 to support the growing Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program, or SINP. These additional funds will support the processing of 7,250 nominations in 2024, which will bring in more than 18,000 newcomers to Saskatchewan between nominees and their families.

Immigration plays an important role in our economy. And it's

imperative that our immigration program protects newcomers and employers. In addition to supporting SINP applications, this funding will also enable the ministry to further enhance program integrity measures, to protect the SINP, protect employers, and protect newcomers from fraud and exploitation, and ensure that Saskatchewan remains a top choice for international candidates looking to live and work in Canada.

As we continue to advocate for more growth and autonomy over immigration, the ministry is also focused on supporting employers as they look outside of Saskatchewan to find the workforce that they need. Recruitment missions both across Canada and abroad help employers hire skilled workers when all other avenues for sourcing local talent have been exhausted.

In the last year, the ministry hosted job fairs in the spring of 2023 in Regina and Yorkton and supported job fairs across the province. This spring a delegation of officials and employers participated in job fairs in Toronto and Calgary, with another planned in Vancouver in June.

International employer-led recruitment missions held in Warsaw, Poland this past September focused on Ukrainian refugees, followed by Manila, Philippines in December. The ministry leads employer-driven recruitment missions in partnership with Saskatchewan's network of international trade offices.

All of these missions have led to employers finding the workforce that they need. As a result of our most recent international recruitment initiative in Manila, more than 1,000 nominations are expected through the SINP. This is proof that we're doing things right. Employers are finding the workforce they need, and we're enabling growth for Saskatchewan's economy.

Another way we're supporting the labour market's strategy's focus on international recruitment is through the introduction of new legislation that strengthens the province's ability to maximize the capacity of the immigration system here in Saskatchewan.

The new immigration services Act, which is before the House at second reading right now, introduced earlier this month, provides the province enhanced authority to investigate and deter immigration fraud, provide stronger protections for foreign workers, and enhances our ability to provide settlement programming for newcomers.

In addition, the new Act will also repeal and replace *The Foreign Worker Recruitment and Immigration Services Act*. This will bring all authorities related to immigration in Saskatchewan under one piece of legislation.

The Act also furthers Saskatchewan's efforts to secure more autonomy over immigration. This means Saskatchewan will have the most aggressive foreign worker protection legislation in Canada and the most robust integrity framework in the nation. We believe Saskatchewan is the best positioned to choose newcomers that will support economic growth in the province. Through relationships with our stakeholders and our understanding of Saskatchewan's regional labour market needs, we're the ones who understand what gaps Saskatchewan needs to fill in our labour market, not the federal government.

[19:45]

In 2022, we proposed the Saskatchewan immigration accord, a modernized agreement with the federal government which would provide Saskatchewan more autonomy over immigration. And while we're pleased SINP has grown since 2022, we are committed to further pursuing other elements of that immigration accord, although I think we've made very significant progress on very large parts of it. A strengthened immigration program and increased autonomy will enable the province to better attract and retain the international workforce we need to support our growing economy.

The labour market strategy also looks to the future, where the evolving needs of industry and our growing population will impact our labour force. One of these critical sectors is health care. The 2024-25 budget includes funding to support the health human resources action plan by investing \$4.1 million for training and settlement supports for in-demand health care occupations. The health human resources action plan or HHR plan outlines a four-point plan to recruit, train, incentivize, and retain health care providers and steadily grow Saskatchewan's health care workforce.

The 2024-25 budget furthers this important strategy by investing \$2.3 million to support training seats for continuing care aides, licensed practical nurses, and medical lab assistants. These positions all play important supporting roles in our health care system and ensure Saskatchewan people receive the care that they need. Growing the province's capacity to train for these occupations will ensure our workforce is able to keep up with growing demand.

ICT's investment into HHR priorities also includes \$1.8 million in credential recognition supports. These supports include settlement programming, such as language assessments, training, and exam fees. As I've said, recognizing credentials in the province is critical for Saskatchewan's labour force to meet the demands of our employers.

This is especially true in the health care sector. We've heard too many stories about medical professionals trained elsewhere in Canada or abroad who aren't working in their fields because they can't get their credentials recognized. Often we'll hear two reasons. It will either take too long or take the required courses to get licensed, or the process is too expensive. This investment will help address both scenarios to ensure more health care workers already living here or planning to move here are able to work in the fields in which they have been trained.

Streamlined and accelerated assessments, training, and licensure pathways as well as settlement programming for internationally trained health care workers are all supported through this targeted HHR support.

In addition to the highlights I've already noted, ICT's budget continues to support core programming and services that ensure Saskatchewan employers are able to train, recruit, and retain the skilled workforce that they need to support investment and economic growth.

To do so the ministry offers a suite of programming for both employers and job seekers. Through our SaskJobs lines of

service, underemployed or unemployed people can access support from career development experts either online, on the phone, or in person at 10 SaskJobs offices across the province. There people can get support with job searching, job matching, career planning, and of course get connected to our program delivery partners across Saskatchewan.

SaskJobs services also include supports for employers, from helping employers determine workforce needs to labour market information to connecting them to funding to support training. SaskJobs is available to help enable employers to find and develop the skilled workforce they need.

The number one barrier to growth identified by employers in Saskatchewan is the lack of an available labour force. By investing in programs that support the Saskatchewan labour market strategy, ICT is ensuring that we have a workforce that will help us realize our full potential. Guided by the strategy's three pillars — connecting people to jobs, recognizing skills, international recruitment — ICT's 2024-25 investments are creating a labour force that supports the province now and into the future.

Seeing record investment, more jobs, and more opportunities, ICT's 2024-25 investments ensure that all Saskatchewan people can benefit from the opportunities provided by our growing economy, ensuring this province is the best place to live, work, and build a life.

With that I would say thank you and look forward to questions.

The Chair: — All right. Thank you, Minister. I'll open the floor to questions now from committee members. And I'll recognize Mr. Burki.

Mr. Burki: — Okay.

The Chair: — It's on.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you, Minister, for your detailed presentation and gives us a full view. Thank you for the hard work that you've been sitting since what time, I don't know. That is incredible job you're doing and . . . Well it's hard. And thank you to the minister.

I'm very, very pleased that . . . In immigration, when I was getting any kind of cases of frustration among people, that they're delayed, thank you for all the help that you have provided us. Thank you to all the executive directors for all the hard work that you guys doing, and it's amazing. And really appreciate that while preparing for today's committee meeting.

Thank you, my colleagues on the other side, MLAs [Member of the Legislative Assembly]. Thank you, my colleague Betty here to support me. It's my first meeting over here in the committee. Might be a little bit nervous, but I will drink water after each and every . . . [inaudible] . . . So thanks to the Legislative Assembly staff over here as well. Thank you for all the support, for all the help that you guys been giving us. Thank you.

So I believe this ministry or your ministry is responsible for labour market planning. Can you please provide me a quick summary of the labour market needs currently and for the next

number of years?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So I'll maybe ask Darcy to go through maybe a bit of a detailed summation and maybe talk about some of the process for how we work with our partners and work with some of the data-gathering organizations on making labour market projections, which really do inform how we do a lot of the investments for job training, whether that be through apprenticeship commission, whether that be through our Polytechnic, how we actually allocate that. So I'll maybe give a bit of a high level summary around a bit of that and then turn it over to Darcy.

But it's a very good question. It's a very good question because it's an important one. We put a lot of work into making sure that the investment that is made is going to reflect the labour force that we need right now, but also the labour force that we're going to need in two years or four years or six years. Because really, given the lead time on some of the training programs that we have in place, that is how far out you have to project when you're making investments, including in this budget.

So that really means that you have to have a very good understanding as to what sort of jobs are going to be required given investments that are being made right now. So BHP, for example, obviously making one of the largest investments in the history of the country. I think it's the second-largest investment in the history of Canada, largest investment in the history of their company. Obviously they're going to need hundreds of employees that are going to be prepared to work in jobs to actually have an 8.5-million-tonne mine operational over the course of the next number of years, and they're going to need these employees that are prepared to step into those roles.

And not just BHP. So you add that up with Mosaic and Nutrien and some of the other potash companies and layer that on top of the other investments into the mining sector, it means that at the end of the day, right now we need to be funding more seats in the skilled trades. We're going to need more electricians. We're going to be needing more mechanics. We're going to be . . . So that is really was the catalyst, even for an additional in-year investment that we made into the apprenticeship and training certification commission to add seats.

And we had a multi-year plan to add additional seats through our apprenticeship and training certification commission. We announced additional seats as a part of this budget. There were additional seats last budget in the in-year addition of seats as well.

And that all really is based on labour market assessments from our partners, using data as well from, you know, organizations like StatsCan. But really we try and work with our employers so we have a very clear understanding of exactly how many positions they're going to need for certain jobs. And they have a very clear idea as to what their future labour force needs are going to be.

So we do that work. We bring that together, and that really is a big part of how we determine funding envelopes for post-secondary institutions, SATCC, and other mechanisms by which we deliver labour market training or programming, including from adult basic to more high-end sort of training.

I'll maybe leave it there, but Darcy can talk about . . . This is a really interesting area, and I'd really commend the work the ministry does on this because it's not always easy. There is an art to it as much as there is a science. But over to you.

Mr. Smycniuk: — Okay. Thanks, Minister. Darcy Smycniuk, assistant deputy minister. So maybe just to add a little bit of detail to the minister's comments. When we look at labour market planning we're looking at this from a number of sources both internal and external. So we will rely on data sources from Stats Canada; there's a number of different sources. The labour force survey is one of the key ones that we do; that comes out on a monthly basis. The survey of employment and payroll hours, employment insurance statistics, job vacancy and wage survey reports.

We also look at local and sector-level intelligence gathering that we do directly with industry associations around the province. The Sask chamber, Economic Development Regina, the chambers in Saskatoon and around the province are a big part of the information that we receive and return to them in terms of some of the analysis that we do.

There's internal data sources. Our saskjobs.ca function is a significant source of data for us in terms of doing some analysis around what the labour market is performing at in terms of job vacancies and by sector and by industry.

We'll look at other surveys that Stats Canada does with respect to a survey on business conditions and the CFIB [Canadian Federation of Independent Business] reports with respect to their analysis.

We produce a five-year labour demand forecast on future trends as well, which I'll speak to in a second.

And then information from the post-secondary system as well is a significant source of input into our understanding of the program response to some of the labour market trends that we're seeing.

On the construction side, BuildForce is another significant input into some of the work we do around planning for the construction trades workforce and the investments that we intend to make through apprenticeship and other skills training programs.

One of the important indicators that we track with respect to the labour market is the labour market tightness indicator, and that is really a definition of low unemployment and high demand. That ratio in Saskatchewan has been hovering around 1 to 1 for about 24, 26 months now. Historically in Saskatchewan that ratio was around 3.4 unemployed persons for every vacancy. So that gives a bit of an indication of exactly how tight the labour market is.

The labour force survey that's released on the first Friday of every month is demonstrating sort of record numbers with respect to employment and labour market participation across the piece at sort of the aggregate levels, but also for males and females and off-reserve Indigenous folks in the labour market currently.

Some of the other things that we're seeing with respect to the labour market is a bit of a change or shift in terms of the context

of the labour market. We're seeing differential impacts by certain sectors. Some of them are evolving due to innovation. Some of these trends that we identify were under way pre-pandemic and they're being accelerated in terms of the opportunity for digitization and automation. And that's being some of the sectors that, say, historically have not been impacted. Manufacturing and our energy sectors have been very quick adopters of the technologies, but we're seeing some of that impact in some of our other sectors now, like hospitality.

Demographic shifts in the province are also significant contributors to some of the work we do around labour market planning. There's no question that, you know, we're seeing the boomers finally starting to leave the labour market, and we're projecting that the last of the baby boomer generation is going to actually exit out at 65 years of age in 2031. So we're going to see that accelerate for a little while yet. We've also seen other folks who are leaving the labour market making different choices, accelerated pace of exits, and those kinds of things.

But you know, on the positive side of things, like I said earlier, we have an off-reserve Indigenous population that's at employment record levels here in the province currently.

So demographics, geographic location of the workforce is also something that we look at with respect to, you know, are there available workers where the jobs are and where the investments are being made? Are they in the occupations and industries that we need to hire, and do we have the right skills in that workforce?

And I think the final point I would make just is around competition for talent and that's something we're monitoring. We're seeing competition, not only within sectors but across sectors now within the province, and then competition for the same talent nationally and internationally so it is really global competition for talent.

[20:00]

The labour market outlook document that I referenced forecasts a total of 136,000 job openings over the five-year period from 2022 to 2026. Of those, about 63,000 of those opportunities are due to economic growth or expansion and demand in the province, 73,000 due to retirements. So replacement of the workforce. All major industries in Saskatchewan are expected to have a net increase in job openings over that forecast period, with largest gains being expected in the agriculture and forestry sectors, health care, social assistance, education, retail trade, and construction.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister, Assistant Deputy Minister for stepping in to the long-term and short-term estimation. It's great, amazing.

My next question will be running into . . . Your government claimed that unemployment rates are low, but there are thousands of people still receiving SIS [Saskatchewan income support]. That doesn't include the number of the people receiving income supports that live on reserves. What are you doing to get those folks into the workforce so they can contribute into the labour market need?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I appreciate the question. And you

know, kind of specific to the income support portion, I know our colleagues in Social Service would be happy to answer that. But what I think is really a good and pertinent question is about engagement in under-representing groups into the labour market. And you know, it was a big part of the labour market strategy and there was a lot of significant consideration that went into it. And you know, we talked about it in our last discussion and a couple of discussions before about really how it is always an essential direction that we look for ways to make sure we are engaging under-represented groups, but particularly Indigenous Saskatchewanians and . . . to be into the labour market. So that was a major component of what we were looking to do through the labour market strategy.

And I'm maybe going to ask one of our team as well to maybe talk a little bit about the elements and the labour market strategy and beyond. I mean, we didn't put everything into the labour market strategy that we're doing in that regard, but about the work that has been done on engaging Indigenous people into the training systems, whether that be through the essential skills component of our program delivery.

You know, a very significant component of our essential skills financial allocations is actually delivered on a reserve. And we made a decision to do that a number of years ago where, you know, there are other jurisdictions where jurisdictional issues really complicate how some of these programs are delivered. We made a policy choice that, you know, there are not illegitimate jurisdictional questions around some of these things but that we would deliver provincial programming on-reserve when it came to labour market training because it was the right thing to do. And we allocate, you know, a significant component of our essential skills training directly on-reserve. I think it's probably about half as far as the adult basic education training allocation.

But I will let Darcy, are you going to . . . Darcy, maybe speak to this one in more detail. Good question.

Mr. Smycniuk: — Sure. Again, thank you for the question. You know, I think we have a continuum of programs and services that are available to individuals who are underemployed or under-represented in the labour market. That continuum ranges from access to the 10 career services SaskJobs offices that we have located around the province, where they can access a variety of services from job search and resume-writing services up through career counselling for programs and access to programs and services for specialized employment services.

A lot of those folks that are coming through our service are persons with disabilities, and those may be a little more marginalized in terms of having access to the labour market. Right now we're looking for every way to activate the entire population of Saskatchewan in terms of making sure that they're prepared for the opportunities that are here today and the ones that are emerging.

The workforce development programs provide access, you know, direct services for . . . [inaudible] . . . counsellors. In our own operations, we contract with a number of organizations and CBOs [community-based organizations] around the province to provide those specialized services as well. We have a number of different programs that are supporting this — targeted initiatives for older workers, self-employment programs are part of the mix.

We make significant investments with SIIT [Saskatchewan Indian Institute of Technologies] for their career centre operations. They had over 6,000 clients come through their service array last year.

And you know, with respect to our Indigenous training folks, you know, we've got a significant collaboration, as the minister outlined, with our post-secondary training partners for essential skills training in the province. That's a \$24 million investment. About 60 per cent of the learners that come through the essential skills programs — and it's an array of programs, from basic essential literacy development right up through the acquisition of your grade 12 — about 60 per cent of those learners are Indigenous, and about 60 per cent are also female. So we're looking at programs to make sure that they have access to those foundational skills that they need to make sure they have access to those jobs that exist today.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister, and thank you, Assistant Deputy Minister, for taking those in consideration. Because when people have jobs they are really more happy, more beneficial to the economy. Less stress, less mental issues because they're engaged in the community. Thank you for that.

It looked like that there has been a reduction in funding for ICS this year as compared to last year. The comparison of figures, if I say, last year was 164 million and this year is 160 million — 160.5 million. Can you confirm that, Minister?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, it's a good question. And there were a couple of changes to the budget which I think at the end of the day really don't have a major impact as far as the ability to do training programs, but there was a federal transfer that was concluded. It was a COVID-era program that was called Skills for Success that the federal government had sunsetted the funding on. So that was really a big part of the reason.

Another part was on the internationally educated nurses. We had allocated resources for a longer training program and it ended up being necessary through the HHR plan. So kind of a good thing in that we didn't have to spend as much on it to put the same number of folks through and get credentialed in a shorter period of time. So those were really the reasons for it.

What we did do is allocate additional resources though within the budget through our credential recognition office. So that was a significant new initiative within our budget, nearly a million dollars that we are adding over and above what we had been doing already, but really we have reorganized within the ministry to set up a credential recognition. We call it the credential recognition service, but it's really a branch within the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training to do this work.

And I kind of offhandedly referenced in my opening comments that we are the only province in Canada that really does this. We actually presented to the Forum of Labour Market Ministers a few months ago in Winnipeg. It was January or February, I forget when it . . . yeah, kind of walked through what we were doing. We weren't able to publicly announce it yet because it was a part of the budget deliberation process, but through that organization, federal-provincial-territorial ministers, which meets quite regularly to really share best practices.

And this is how and why most of the other provinces in Canada have copied our foreign qualification legislation. And I fully expect . . . I mean, I'm happy that they're doing it, but I fully expect you're going to see other provinces in Canada move to setting up separate organizations within their labour market departments or ministries as the case may be, to really pursue very specifically credential recognition.

So you know, we're really pioneering this, and you know, I'd said in kind of the earlier estimates, in Trade and Export, you've probably seen signs up around the city of Regina. You would see them in Saskatoon. I haven't been to Moose Jaw and Prince Albert but I think we have the same product that is up in those communities as well. And really what they come down to is saying, if you have a credential or a skill that you've obtained from outside of Saskatchewan or outside of Canada and you want that credential or skill recognized in Saskatchewan, call us. And the idea being . . . Not just the idea. What we are going to be doing is working, and are already, individually with folks who have a credential that they have obtained from outside of Saskatchewan, to get that credential recognized.

And this can be really a daunting process. I mean, you well know. I mean, this is a very daunting process for newcomers, especially newcomers to Canada who have a skill, obtained it outside of the country at an institution, you know, that may have a slightly different way of training than an institution in Saskatchewan. It's a daunting process to try and actually get that credential recognized.

So we want to really cut out what would be a very challenging process for newcomers or for those from outside of Saskatchewan or in other parts of Canada, to really cut through that and have people who are dedicated to working with our regulators and with our newcomers to make it happen, to get to yes, to find a way to make sure that our newcomers to Canada or newcomers to Saskatchewan are able to attach to the labour force, enter the labour market at the maximum capacity that they have, based on their training.

So that's why we're advertising around the province, to make sure that there's an awareness that this service exists. And we have dedicated and have really organized it in such a way that we have back-end support to make this successful. And I think it'd be fair to say . . . I'd actually be interested in the latest update from our team because I haven't asked this question in a couple of weeks, but I know we have had a very significant spike in communications, or contact, from newcomers based on this. And really we've had the online component of the campaign running for some time now, but we really only have the billboards up in the last couple of weeks here. So I fully expect that we are going to be seeing, you know, a big uptick in the amount of interest in accessing the credential recognition service.

But that really, you know, is going to be a major undertaking as far as a reallocation of resources within the budget. We put significant additional resources into administering *The Immigration Services Act* as well. And I'll maybe not get into all of that right this moment, but I'm sure we'll have a chance to talk about some elements of that if not here tonight, then when we do committee stage of the bill as well.

But you know, we put very significant resources into our

immigration program in addition to what already had been significant resources to address these two items, so good question.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister, for your detailed explanation for that. The question I asked, I was just a little bit worried it might be . . . will impact our immigration programs, this budget, but eventually if we are saving money, it's great. But if you'd said that this is the protocol of COVID, might be in COVID we were using some money extra for extra things, but if it is not affecting, that's great.

I'm the critic for Immigration, a person of colour. People come to me a lot for different concerns. I believe that in your office will get a letter from my office about credentials, which is great and I appreciate for that.

So what are the implications of this budget reduction so there will be no implication, any kind of fact on this one that we reduced the budget?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — On the federal funding component, on that part of the program?

Mr. Burki: — Well overall that it has gone from 160 million to . . . from 164 to 160.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean the federal funding reduction, so that program is just sunsetted, is basically what happened on that one.

Mr. Burki: — Okay.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — You know, one of the things that's interesting about this ministry is, because a lot of the actual program delivery is done by partners, you actually end up with significant variation between years about basically how the contract systems all work with these things.

So I'm not the kind of subject matter expert in how that's all administered, but that's one of the differences than you would find with some of the other line ministries in government is the significant reliance on partnerships with third parties to do program delivery. So I think that was a part of the other component of the funding reduction on our internationally educated nurses which I'd referenced, because our partners who are delivering the service actually — and Sask Poly, that does the program delivery — there had been . . . And this is really quite a win, I would say, as far as the credential recognition component.

[20:15]

The bridging program that had existed initially for internationally educated nurses was around . . . I think it was a two-year bridging program. You know, obviously for nurses, whether they're trained in Philippines or, you know, the United Kingdom or I mean places which have very good training for internationally educated health care providers, there was still . . . Because of the way the regulator had structured the ability to have your credentials recognized in Saskatchewan, it was a two-year bridging program.

So I mean, our view was that that was not a reasonable

proposition, given the fact that you had been a fully accredited nurse in another part of the world, understanding that there are some elements that need to be learned in the Saskatchewan system, but it doesn't take two years.

So we worked with the regulator on that, and Sask Poly worked with the regulator and worked with ICT and worked with the Ministry of Health and the SHA [Saskatchewan Health Authority] about what a reasonable bridging process and time frame would look like and how that program could be delivered by Sask Poly.

So where we ended up landing, you know . . . This was not overnight. There was a lot of work that went into this, but we got to a 14-week program, which is really quite a remarkable thing to go from a two-year required bridging program to a 14-week program, to have a foreign-trained, internationally educated nurse be able to enter into our health care system, providing care for Saskatchewan people.

So I really take my hat off to all of those involved in getting to that time, but what we had actually budgeted through the health human resources plan when it was put together was predicated on the much longer training program, which obviously would have cost significantly more than a 14-week program.

So that's one of the reasons why you end up with a lower budget, is because of the fact that we're actually doing things more efficiently and it doesn't cost as much. So you know, you have different elements of that with third-party contract providers, or third-party delivery options. And we're always seeking to work with our providers to find efficiencies and better ways of doing things, which allows us then to do reallocations into the department on high-priority initiatives.

So that was why I kind of went to the additional resource allocation for whether it be *The Immigration Services Act* or — what was the other 900,000 we put into? — sorry, there was another initiative which I had referenced which slipped my mind after four hours of committee. But anyway that's kind of the long answer to the question.

Mr. Burki: — Well thank you very much for that. So when we bring in the workforce from abroad, like I do understand that nurses came from Philippines, which was the short-term solution that we got out from COVID and a lot of burden was on our health care. So do you have any planning in the long term that we can have to invest over here locally?

I can give you one example just from my own family. One of my daughters, she is down in Toronto university. She is doing biomedical physics. The other day she was telling mom that, "when I do my Ph.D., I will come and work in Regina." And I was listening to them and said, "why you will come to Regina?" And then she said, "Dad, Mom makes very good food."

So our kids like this place, and it doesn't matter if everybody wants their child to want to stay with them. And I guess in long-term solution that will be great so we can retain more people over here and interest over here in the long term.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I appreciate that. And you know, I would say that this scenario where a lot of thought has

been put in by our senior team in making sure that, you know, we have the right processes, we have the right . . . we're asking the right questions as well at the front end of going through the recruitment or immigration process to really make sure that — you know, we have a limited number of spots in these programs — that those who are making application, coming through the process, you know, have an intention of residing or at least, you know, hoping to reside long term in the jurisdiction here that they're relocating to.

So I'll maybe ask one of our team to talk about maybe what some of those actual structural changes have looked like within the ministry. One observation I would add, and it's really been kind of through first-hand experience in how we have really been pioneering in a lot of ways some of the recruitment globally, and what really has worked has been employer-led training.

So you have your employer-led recruitment who, you know, really have a clear idea as to the number of positions and what positions they want to hire for, have work that's been done in advance where they have applications from folks. Like you know, we did this in Warsaw and we did this in the Philippines and, you know, our intention is to do this in other jurisdictions beyond that. That would include India. That would include Vietnam. I think we are giving consideration to and working through some details on that as well.

By having your employers with you, understanding what they need, having done the groundwork in advance, and employers who we have worked with to make sure that at the other end the settlement component to that is in place — which really is a hugely significant part of long-term outcomes is having front-end settlement in a good spot — and also as a part of that, having officials with the employers able to really do some of the interviewing and the processing part of it face to face, it makes a difference. It really does.

And so I'll maybe ask Christa to maybe speak to how we have been doing that. But I think increasingly what you are going to see is a larger component of our entire program being processed, recruited, worked with in that way. Because I think it does lead to better outcomes and better retentions.

Ms. Ross: — Thank you for the question. Christa Ross, assistant deputy minister. So you asked specifically about health, and certainly there's a comprehensive and aggressive health human resources action plan by government. So we support that work along with colleagues from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Advanced Education. And we're looking at all options in terms of developing the labour we need and the skills locally, as well as outside of Saskatchewan and then outside of Canada as well.

So to the example or the family member you mentioned, I know we've talked a lot already about credential recognition services, and most of us probably think of international or foreign credentials first. But the office is also set up to support labour mobility within Canada because there are, there continue to be barriers, whatever the regulated occupation may be.

There isn't necessarily an automatic, streamlined process to have your licensure move from one province to another province. So we do provide a service and supports for labour mobility

applicants as well, so that would help nurses or whatever the health profession may be who might be looking or working elsewhere in Canada to be able to come to Saskatchewan and get to work as quickly as possible.

So the credential recognition service, just to go into a bit more detail than what the minister has already shared, it is a relatively new service that we've set up over the past year and with a pretty ambitious marketing campaign. We are starting to see an increase in the number of individuals who are reaching out to us seeking that service. So for the most part, it is individuals who are already in Saskatchewan and have mostly been here for a number of years and are looking to have their credentials recognized.

But we are also seeing some traffic coming from other parts of Canada, and some of that was generated or motivated by some of the job fairs we recently attended. So I think in the minister's opening remarks he mentioned a recruitment fair or job fair we attended in Toronto and Calgary. And actually we had somebody from our credential recognition services office there in person to answer questions.

And I think he was probably the most busy just for individuals who had already immigrated but again were still facing barriers or unsure of a way forward in terms of having their credentials recognized. So generated quite a bit of interest from other parts of the country as well in the service, and looking for opportunities to come to Saskatchewan and work.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. It looks like that the labour market program budget is down from 130.9 million to 127.2 million. Can you confirm that, Minister?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So no, appreciate the question. So yeah, we just looked over the subvote (IC04). So those were really the components that we had talked about before. And there was an addition in that one on the SATCC funding, so it balanced out to, with the reductions that we had talked about already on the Skills for Success and some of the reductions on the HHR plan, because of the efficiency, that's why it came out that way.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. Government consistently speaks to the need to be responsive — which is great; I will say that — to the need of the student community and labour market, yet you are still cutting funds from the labour market program. Can you please explain that?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No I think we had kind of talked about maybe a little bit just on the details on the subvote on (IC04) and why that is. You know, one of the additional components we made though was around the labour market plan that we had put forward. And you know, that really kind of encapsulates a lot of different elements of whether it be (IC04) or whether it be some of the other subvotes and, you know, the different elements that went into the development of the plan.

So I'll maybe talk just a touch about that because we, you know, I think have canvassed in some degree of detail kind of the pillars of what we are seeking to do through the labour market strategy. But you know, one of the real things that we work hard to do and it's . . . I talked a bit about this in the Trade and Export Development estimates. But there's a very close relationship, obviously, between Immigration and Career Training and Trade

and Export Development that goes beyond just kind of sharing a minister. You know, there's very much a relationship that has to be, and is, very close because of the fact that we have different elements that directly impact both parts of the ministry. So we work really side by side in the creation of the labour market strategy and the investment attraction strategy because they go together in so many very real and substantive ways.

So that means, you know, working with our stakeholder groups, whether that be our chambers of commerce, whether that be our like Hospitality Saskatchewan. There is, you know, a very long list of third-party groups who are industry representatives or, you know, businesses and others that had really identified when we were coming out of COVID that they felt we were going to have a significant labour market challenge.

And it was not something that we, you know, probably at the very start of COVID expected we were going to see but, you know, Darcy alluded to some of the challenges, I think, of the shrinking labour market pool that came out of the pandemic where you had folks who were leaving the labour market probably a few years earlier in some cases than would have been expected, and that really led to a very apparent tightening in the labour market elasticity.

So we ended up with, you know — Darcy talked about it — the 1-to-1 vacancy-to-unemployment ratio, which is about as tight of a labour market as you could find. And that happened pretty quickly. We had thankfully been doing some work on that in advance and planning, but that was, you know . . . Part of coming out of that was the genesis of working on a labour market strategy.

[20:30]

So you know, where that all ended up landing was, you know, the major effort being on ensuring that those who are here in this province have first opportunity to take advantage of jobs that are being created, really engaging under-represented groups into the labour market. And that means, you know, significant focus on Indigenous people and on those with disabilities and finding ways that we could pathway these folks into the labour market. And I think, you know, we're seeing results from that. We're kind of seeing them month to month that they are really quite positive.

And then of course on the credential recognition piece, we talked about a bit. And on the recruitment part, which you know, I think we've had a bit of a discussion as well.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister. Well saving money is always good for family, for government as well. The more money you save, the more we can do. But I'm just worried that whatever we are reducing money, our amount in . . . Especially I can see a reduction in essential skill training and I can see in pre-employment programming services, skill training program. In the budget there is a reduction in all of them.

If you think that it is an optimal solution that we are getting the same benefit that we were taking in last year's budget, with less budget we are achieving our objective, that's perfectly okay with me. But if there's anything else that reduction is impacting, any of the training, then can you please brief me about that, please?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I appreciate it, and I do. And I think we're not losing capacity. I think we're probably gaining capacity, and for the reasons we talked about.

One of the areas where, you know, there has been significant additional investment into has been around the apprenticeship and training certification commission. And there are a variety of reasons for that, but one of the, you know, and I think it got some attention, but it was actually really quite a significant in-year adjustment where we added beyond the seats that had even been planned to be added and beyond what we had even allocated in the last budget, over and above that. We were able and in a position to add more resources.

So maybe I'll have . . . Darcy, do you want to maybe talk about SATCC and just kind of what the implications of that are and the significance of the additional seats being added?

Mr. Smycniuk: — Thank you, Minister. You know, I mentioned earlier that there's a significant demand for construction and skilled trades in the province. And this is where our work really does closely align with the investment attraction strategy. We're working very closely with the Ministry of Trade and Export Development along with other ministries and Crowns and government to identify early where those projects are going to be located in the province, understand the size of the workforce they're going to need and the requirements that they're going to have, the sequencing of those projects, and doing a bit of a forecast in terms of what we need to do in terms of apprenticeship-related training or skilled trades training through our regional college system for pre-employment apprenticeship.

So last year we made an investment for 250 seats. We have increased that again this year by another 250 seats, and at the end of the fiscal last year added an investment that would load in another 100 seats. So that's a 650-seat lift in the apprenticeship training system year over year.

We think that capacity matches the existing demand to make sure that we have a skilled workforce in line with the timing of the projects that are coming online. And that in conjunction with the two-and-a-half-billion-dollar investment we made through the college system last year to do pre-employment skilled trades training, which has been maintained this year, we'll make sure that we have access to another 200 to 250 training seats for individuals interested in a variety of skilled trades for the system.

Mr. Burki: — Okay, thank you very much. Just to confirm that this direction that we can see will not be losing job opportunity that we are forecasting?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I would say that, no, I don't think we're losing any opportunities. The reality is that, you know, we do have a labour market challenge on our hands in that we have a shortage of folks in particular areas, and we talked a little bit about that earlier today. But really I would say there is an economy-wide challenge. Some of these sectors probably have more acute issues, and it is, you know, a bit of a movable thing, depending on a variety of factors.

But you know, that really has been the focus though, is how can we allocate resources such that we are going to be able to fill the jobs that are being created right now in the economy. And that

means the very large investments into the mining space, into the energy space, into the ag tech, ag value-added space. You know, a lot of these are highly dependent on those with trade certifications. Not just and only that, but that is really where, you know, we had seen and do see a challenge in front of us, so now adding more resources into that space.

Also, you know, the international recruitment part of this is not to be underrated. You know, we have had really quite a remarkable success in a couple of the international recruitment missions that we did where employers who were a part of the mission, they had a well-defined target for what they were seeking. And there was one case there were, I think eight welders, one of our companies — a well-known company here in Regina; I won't name who it was, but a well-known company here in Regina — they wanted to find eight welders. Well as it turns out, they came back with 16 welders. It was, you know, really very successful for them.

And it wasn't that they didn't want to hire welders from Regina. It was simply that there were not enough people to actually fill the jobs that they were needing to fill to actually deliver the orders, which are ever-increasing from their business around the world. So that really is what's driving the international recruitment component to this.

There was another, a very large employer here in the province with a number of different sites across Saskatchewan. I think they were looking to hire 10 or 12 mechanics, and they ended up hiring about double the number of mechanics that they were hoping to hire, which, you know, really for them is a huge benefit. But it wasn't, again, because they didn't want to not hire mechanics from Saskatchewan or from other parts of the country. They just couldn't find them.

So those are going to be initiatives which we think have been successful. And you know, these are often companies that are quite sophisticated, so they have understandings of what settlement outcomes and success look like and how to create the conditions for long-term attachment to both their company and to the province. And this is going to be a part of how we make sure that our retention rates are higher.

And so you know, these are really positive partnerships that are going to benefit companies. They're going to benefit the province. They're going to benefit everybody across Saskatchewan. So that really is what I see as a win-win-win, and that's why we're going to continue on the international recruitment part for those gaps that we just kind of can't fill here in Saskatchewan.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister. In 2022-23, I see that from the annual report that we're over 8.2 million website visits to the saskjobs.ca, which is a huge hit on that site, and the total of 182,187 job postings. What does this say about the need for the labour market program in this province?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, I mean it's been very successful, our SaskJobs website. And maybe just kind of a bit of a backstory on SaskJobs as well because this is a site that we put significant resources into as a province because it's worked and it works for employers. Our employers like the website. I think our job seekers are familiar and like the functionality of it

as well.

There was actually a circumstance 8 or 10 years ago, yeah, where the federal government — actually I think it was about eight years ago — the federal government actually basically tried to get provinces and territories to all use their national Job Bank system by financially incentivizing provinces to become a part of it. And there were a number of strings that came along with this which happens with the federal government, you know, bearing gifts I guess.

What it all boiled down to was the national Job Bank, they wanted to rebrand with the SaskJobs logo and say that that was the Saskatchewan national Job Bank website. As it turns out, it never worked. It was basically impossible for our employers to use, and there were a whole bunch of reasons why they really, really didn't like it.

So we ended up basically saying, we're not going to use your federal website. In fact we're going to put additional money . . . And we put significant, like millions of dollars into making sure that our SaskJobs website has maintained functionality for our employers and prospective employees of those employers over the course of the last 8 or 10 years.

So I'm not sure if the federal government are still trying to get PTs [provinces and territories] to do that. Probably. Sounds about par for the course for them. But we are not going to be using the national Job Bank website.

And that really has resulted in the success of that site. So 8.2 million visits in '22-23. I would actually suspect it will be higher this year. I don't know if we have data for that or not. It will be published at the appropriate time. I think as of last week there were about 14,000, 14,000-ish jobs, and I'm not sure what it is today.

But it's really a functional site. It works well. And you know, we work with our employers carefully, closely to make sure that they appreciate the functionality and it's as user-friendly as possible.

So I'm not sure; I think, Darcy, you wanted to talk about SaskJobs?

Mr. Smycniuk: — You know, Minister, maybe I'll just add a couple of things here.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Sure.

Mr. Smycniuk: — In 2023 we had nearly 7,700 employers registered to use the saskjobs.ca system. And they posted over 170,000 vacancies over that year, which was the highest year we had on record.

In '23-24, so the current year — this is to the end of February — we had again about 7,600 employers registered on the system, tracking again to 170,000-plus job vacancies being advertised.

So at any given day we're probably averaging about 14,000 job postings.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So I would add to that as well it's a part of how we do our labour market baselining as well. You

know, it's really quite a valuable source of real-time data about where we have gaps in the labour market, and it feeds into the other data that we have that, you know, might not be quite as time sensitive.

But it's a part of that matrix that you asked about in your first question about how do we do both short-, medium-, and long-term labour market planning and resource allocation based on that. So SaskJobs is a not insignificant part of some of that data that goes into making some of those decisions as well beyond the actual day-to-day use of the website.

Mr. Burki: — So just to confirm for me that the saskjobs.ca, this website is taking a posting from each and every company worldwide or from throughout the country? Or it's just restricted under the umbrella of Sask province?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. Yeah, both.

Mr. Smycniuk: — Yeah, thank you for the question. These are Saskatchewan employers who are posting on the system, but we do have people looking for those jobs from all over the world really. I think in March of '24 we had 55 per cent of the visits on the site were from people in Saskatchewan looking for work, 36 per cent were from the provinces or territories in the country, and 9 per cent were from international locations.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. Your annual report acknowledged a referral from Social Services indicating in 2022-2023 ICT employees met with 2,213 Social Services clients to create an action plan to support their career development goal and connection with the labour market. It states that of 563 clients whose action plans were closed, 52 per cent went on to employment and 30 per cent continued with further education.

These numbers look good, but why were only 563 action plans closed out of 2,213 clients' records. What happened with the rest?

[20:45]

Ms. Bourgoïn: — Thank you very much for the question. Richelle Bourgoïn. I'm the deputy minister.

When we're talking about the clients that haven't successfully completed those action plans, there's generally a number of reasons. In some cases they're still ongoing. Life happens for individuals while they're in progress and working through that program. Perhaps their spouse has a job in a different community. They have a child that takes them out of the labour force for a period of time. Health concerns.

In some cases our clients aren't prepared to transition through that work plan. Perhaps there's a mental health or physical health illness that requires them to then seek service back through our partners in the Ministry of Social Services. And so it is very probable, and certainly hopeful, that we'll see them return to our system again, but we do not conclude the action plan until they have successfully completed the program.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you very, very much. It's very hard to do whatever you want, but I do understand that. Thank you for that.

I note that budget support employment for a person with a disability in the last year, we have the same funding as we have for this year. I understand that the SAID [Saskatchewan assured income for disability] caseload at Social Services has been going up significantly.

Do you not think that it's important to increase the employment opportunities for people with a disability? And I think the minister talked about that. But I was just having some thoughts about that, if you have the same funding we are increasing or what?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. No, I appreciate that and I'll probably ask the team to maybe speak to a little bit of our individualized approaches, or the approach to persons with disabilities.

But one of the kind of overarching things to take into account with labour market programming is components of labour market programming are provincial resources. Other components are cost-shared resources with the federal government, and there are individual . . . There are transfers from the federal government that are allocated very specifically for different envelopes of labour market training.

We report them back to the federal government. Those are based on long-term agreements, so there is not variation year to year. There is on occasion, but it will be when there's a change in the relationship or contract with the federal government on that.

So the way that persons with disabilities funding, much of it, you know . . . We have components of this that are provincially funded, of course. But what might be showing up — and I'm sorry; I don't have the exact figure that you're looking at in front of you — but there had been, as a part of the way the federal transfers worked, it dedicated allocation for persons with disabilities. It's now a part of the overall LMDA [labour market development agreement], right, the LMDAPD that rolled in.

So again, even more context I guess. The way the federal transfers work, there had been originally four different transfers that the federal government had set up. They were deeply complex and they were, from a reporting and administration context, really quite a nightmare. We've been allocating for well over 10 years that they needed to be rolled into more manageable and sensible envelopes. But there had been four of them at one point. There was a labour market transfer agreement, there was a labour market development agreement, there was a targeted initiative for all the workers, and there was a labour market development for persons with disabilities.

So the envelopes that kind of were allocated were rolled into the labour market development and labour market transfer agreements. So we only have two now, but there still exist these categories that had been independent stand-alones before. So the federal funding in these things — well there's actually an LMDA top-up as well, without muddying the waters even more incomprehensibly — but these are agreements we have with the federal government. So they have an allocated and dedicated amount that's put into them, and we often will have additional parts of that we put into it.

And a lot of these kind of programs are delivered by third parties

as well. We don't do all of the program delivery. But as far as persons with disabilities, I will ask Richelle, if you want to . . .

Ms. Bourgoin: — Yes.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay, yes.

Ms. Bourgoin: — Thank you very much, Minister. And so it is our hope when individuals enter those programs that they ultimately obtain an employment outcome or the opportunity for additional training that would better suit them to achieve their career goal.

And so a good outcome would not be to maintain the status quo for individuals that are enrolling in those programs. We want to make sure the programs are tailored in such a way through our community partners that the individuals in the programs achieve the outcome that they've intended to achieve and have the supports that they do. At that point they would typically move either into employment or into employment where accommodation can be made to support them and there are other avenues for funding available.

So that would be where you would see the provincial disability strategy, for example, come into play to be able to support accessible workplaces, for an example. At the same time, while I think it's 9.893 million is dedicated specifically to employability assistance for people with disabilities, that does not exclude the participation of people with disabilities in any number of our other labour market programs, as we're very confident that we have the tools in place to be able to ensure that those individuals who are participating in the program have that pathway to employment. Really going back to that first pillar of our labour market strategy, to ensure that all Saskatchewan residents have barriers removed to ensure that they are participating fully in the economy to the extent that they are both willing and able to do so.

And so there is a suite of programs and services that really are designed to serve that. And the outcomes that we see from this funding envelope are largely positive, thanks to the really terrific work of our partners in the communities that are delivering those services.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, and I would just reiterate that. I mean there are partners who do program delivery but also businesses that are just very, very open to finding solutions. And I think they view it as win-wins as well, right. I mean they're getting good employees, and it all works out very well.

And so the kind of whole backstory to how the labour market programming is delivered — I think I might have talked about it a number of years ago — but I really view this as kind of an analogous circumstance to how immigration programming is going to develop. And they're both within the same file.

But labour market programming had, up until the mid-1990s, been duplicated in function by federal and provincial governments who both had separate ways and separate avenues for labour market programming to be developed.

What happened in the 1995 federal budget is the Government of Canada really at that point made a unilateral decision to just say

. . . well there was support, I think, for this from provinces and territories in the aggregate. But they said, “We’re out. We will transfer you through dedicated transfers.” And there were at that point, I think, two of them. “You PTs then deliver the labour market programming. You’re closer to your labour market. You understand the needs better.” It was the right decision. It was.

I’m a little worried that we’re seeing some backsliding on that overall approach. Sorry, I haven’t actually had the chance to talk to my team what was in the federal budget today, but there was a degree of concern that the feds might be moving away from that.

Ms. Bourgoin: — They were silent, Minister. So we don’t know.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Okay, well we’ll take that as a win.

So really, you know, the case that we have been making, and we’ve made this case at both the Immigration minister’s table and at the labour market table, is that the devolution of labour market funding to PTs has resulted in better outcomes. Whether it be for persons with disabilities, which deputy minister had just spoken to; whether that be for other under-represented groups in the labour market, Indigenous people; whether that be for newcomers — you have better outcomes through a single delivery mechanism with a better understanding being closer to labour market and employers.

Same case we’ve been making with immigration; why provinces and territories are better positioned to actually do the selection component because we have a closer attachment to newcomer communities in our provinces. We have a better understanding as to how we’re going to get better settlement outcomes in communities and understanding how labour market attachment, and even things as granular as regulatory processes, is going to translate for newcomers to have credentials recognized.

So I really think that, you know, we’ve seen this right now. The federal government have been reluctant to characterize, I think, what they’re doing, quite how they are doing it. Which is a recognition that that’s probably the right argument, that provinces probably are better positioned to actually deliver selection, particularly on the economic front, on immigration.

We want family class as well. That was a part of our immigration accord we submitted. The federal government will not provide that authority to any province or territory right now, and I want to be very clear about that. We have requested that authority. Quebec won’t even, has not even . . . They haven’t received that authority through their immigration accord either.

But I think there will come a day where basically provinces will do the vast majority, which we already do in Saskatchewan, the vast majority of processing of immigration, but it’s because of the size of our program relative to federal streams. But I think ultimately it’ll get to the place with most PTs. So that’s really an analogous situation though to what we saw in the labour market with the devolution of funding historically by the Government of Canada to PTs.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister and Deputy Minister. So I will just move to another area of my critic, that’s full-time equivalency and salary. What were the total salary dollars for the ministry this year as compared to the last year? And how many

staff do we have?

Ms. Bourgoin: — So in 2023-24 we had a total of 264 FTEs [full-time equivalent] at the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training for a total salary of \$20.274 million. In 2024-25 we had a total number of 273 FTEs. So we received an additional 9 FTEs in this year’s budget, and those are primarily supporting the credential recognition service as well as the immigration program more broadly.

Mr. Burki: — Were there any laid off?

Ms. Bourgoin: — No.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. I note that there has been significant increase to support nomination through the Saskatchewan nominee program, as the minister talked about that. And for the fraud detection in this program, was there a spending increase for additional staff?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I’ll maybe actually let the team speak. I’ll introduce that by saying, yeah, we’re going to be adding additional resources to the immigration program. You know, there for a variety of reasons. And partly it’s because we’re transferring some of the responsibilities that had previously been in another ministry into Immigration and Career Training as well. But I’m not sure. Richelle, if you want to speak to that, or Christa?

Ms. Ross: — Sure. Thank you for the question. So the additional resources are going into what we are calling a program compliance branch. So that’s essentially the branch that is going to be responsible for administering and enforcing the new immigration services Act that was just introduced last week. So we’re expanding our capacity there in order to be able to effectively administer and enforce that new legislation.

And as the minister said, two of those incremental positions are actually just a transfer from the Ministry of Labour Relations and Workplace Safety as responsibility for the existing foreign worker recruitment and immigration services Act has transferred from LRWS [Labour Relations and Workplace Safety] to Immigration and Career Training. So they had two dedicated positions for that Act, so those resources came along with responsibility for the legislation.

Mr. Burki: — Has there been a change to the salaries in training or employment training services?

Ms. Bourgoin: — So the salaries within the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training?

[21:00]

Mr. Burki: — Yes.

Ms. Bourgoin: — So they are part of the overall Public Service Commission compensation package, which would be consistent with other ministries and agencies across the public service.

Mr. Burki: — Okay. It seems to me that you increased the staffing for immigration support and fraud detection, and reduced the staffing for training and employment services. What is then

the difference of that?

Ms. Bourgoin: — So in training and employment services, we have moved some of the resources that we've had support typically in the past as part of an organizational restructuring to be able to better position the ministry as a whole to respond to the three priorities in the labour market strategy. So we didn't reduce any jobs, but we may have changed the scope of people's roles.

For example, we opened an office for the first time specifically designed to support Indigenous services and the northern economy related to opportunities in the North. And so we've shifted some of the focus, but we haven't changed the overall footprint. In fact we've increased it.

Mr. Burki: — Okay. Okay. Thank you, Deputy Minister. About immigration, what is the status of immigration agreement with the federal government?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — So there's a number of components to this. I'll maybe speak to the immigration accord that was proposed. But there are several other almost day-to-day relationships that we have with the federal government when it comes to what is an area of shared constitutional jurisdiction on immigration.

So we had put forward in 2022, I think, the immigration accord proposal, which sought an increased number to our provincial nominee program. Firstly it was an increase. We've seen an increase to the PNP program subsequent to that, not quite to the level which we requested. And there's still some moving parts on all of this. And I think frankly there's a bit of confusion on the part of the federal government about how they're going to be allocating PNP spots within the overall system. So that will be a point of discussion.

We have an FPT [federal-provincial-territorial] meeting with the federal minister and other provinces and territories in about a month, and this will be a primary area of discussion. So there's kind of that element on the allocation, but we have received a commitment to a significantly higher allocation.

There was an element that we had asked for, control over the selection component on economic migration. Federal government have made some not insignificant changes to how selection is done, which has given provinces and territories significantly more authority over the selection component, you know, which goes to the earlier discussion we had had around provinces being better positioned to do selection. Because I think we are closer to our labour markets and have a better understanding of what is going to lead to successful outcomes for newcomers, really with an aggregate benefit for everybody. So that was one part of it.

We had asked for control over the family class of immigration as well. The federal government are deeply resistant to having family-class selection given to provinces and territories. That is probably their line in the sand on a lot of things. But I think ultimately that will end up maybe not in a straight-up policy change but in a de facto sense. I think more of that will happen over time through design changes within PNPs or criteria within PNPs that allow for different allocation of points and those sort

of things. So that was one part of it.

The other thing which I really think is central and will happen eventually is going to be the transfer of settlement funding. This is an area where I think there is an undue amount of potential deportation, not always in practice but you end up with situations where right-hand-left-hand scenarios are not entirely aligned. We're fortunate in Saskatchewan in that we have a fairly small number of settlement organizations that do a lot of the work. So we kind of . . .

It's a pretty small world in that we know each other and can have discussions about what is being provided by one level of government or what's being provided by the other to try and avoid duplication. But I can assure members that in some other jurisdictions that maybe, you know, have larger populations, more providers, there are real issues on duplication of service.

So I think having the settlement services devolved through provinces and territories to partner with third-party delivery organizations, again like labour market programming, will provide better outcomes for newcomers than having federal and provincial with different contractual relationships. So that was kind of what we had proposed. So we've gotten, you know, significant traction in large parts of that. And I think even on the settlement funding part, there's a recognition on the part of the federal government that that's probably an argument that makes sense. But they're getting there. They're getting there. So we'll keep pushing on that one.

As for, you know, the more formal structured relationship between PNPs, provincial immigration department, what had been CIC [Citizenship and Immigration Canada] . . . I forget what the acronym is now. But I mean we have, you know, very regular communication. There are formalized processes for changes to different PNP streams, which we do quite frequently to respond to labour market demands, changes, those sort of things.

But I'm not sure . . . Maybe, Christa, do you want to speak to some of that? Because it is kind of one of these areas where you do have joint constitutional authority over a single subject that, I mean, I think by and large works decently well. But you end up with differential outcomes because you have, you know, for example, I think our processing times now at the front end for our PNP process are three, four weeks. It depends on the stream.

But you know, it's relatively short, whereas you had the actual admission part of it, which is the federal constitutional responsibility. This takes years — years — which is obviously very frustrating for newcomers who have made application through PNP. You know, we can provide the nomination and then you're kind of in a limbo waiting for . . . It was four years at one point I think for different streams to have the actual admission part of it done by the federal government. I think it's a little better now, but it's not great.

So over to you, Christa.

Ms. Ross: — Sure. Thank you, Minister. So just a bit more context I guess around the structure to your question. We do have an agreement with the federal government, the Canada-Saskatchewan Immigration Agreement. It was signed in 2005, so

it's a fairly dated agreement. There have been a few attempts over the years at renegotiating that agreement.

Most recently, as the minister mentioned, we presented our Saskatchewan accord in 2022, modelled closely after the *Quebec Accord*. And while we haven't really seen IRCC [Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada] come to the table on that proposal, we've certainly made some progress outside of that as well in terms of how we work with our federal colleagues.

A couple of specific examples I can share with you is there was this long-standing issue of, again a case of duplication where, you know, under this agreement we have the ability and the authority to operate. The Saskatchewan immigrant nominee program gives the province flexibility to design different categories and streams that align with our labour market needs and priorities. And it's an economic immigration program.

But we found ourselves dealing with duplication when we would set that criteria; receive an application; determine that application meets criteria and that they will meet a labour market need or fill a labour market gap; approve them for nomination, which allows them to apply to the federal government for permanent residency. And then IRCC would assess that same application on their ability to economically establish in Saskatchewan.

And I can remember at one point in the history of the program where that was actually a fairly prevalent issue we were dealing with, where we were seeing a higher level or a higher rate of refusals by the federal government for individuals that we had assessed based on the criteria that we had developed, because they didn't feel that that individual would be able to economically establish in Saskatchewan. So that's been a sticking point.

And I'm happy to report that we've made some progress there. And so we have agreement from IRCC, the federal department responsible for immigration, that they will no longer look at ability to economically establish with provincial nominees.

So you know, that's just one example of how, even though we haven't formalized a new agreement, we've still made some progress on how we work with them. But under that agreement we do have to work with the federal government on the design and implementation of any new streams or pilots, so we can't do that completely independently. But we have a really good working relationship with them, so it's very collaborative.

And again that's a relationship that has, I would say, matured and evolved over the years as well, where I'd say there's a very high level of trust from IRCC in how we're operating the program. But again they set the overall immigration levels. They set the levels and allocations across the country for provincial nominee programs, and so we have a certain amount that we can work within.

So that's the agreement and more operationally how we work with IRCC. There is, you know, more formal federal-provincial-territorial Forum of Ministers Responsible for Immigration. Minister Harrison is actually the provincial Co-Chair right now, and we are hosting the provincial-territorial secretariat for that for the next three years. So there is kind of more of a formal governance, formal FPT collaboration and some structure to

support that. So that's the group that the minister mentioned will be meeting in Montreal next month.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yes. Thanks, Christa, for that. Just a very good explanation. You know, one of the challenges we have had is around that levels question, and I alluded to it a little bit in the last answer. But you know, this has been really a moving target with the Government of Canada through multiple governments, frankly. I mean there is a legislated time frame in which the levels plan had to be released, and there were always questions whether it would actually be released on time. Sometimes it wasn't, even when it was legally required to be.

Then we've encouraged at the FPT table, so other provinces and territories, to have multi-year levels planning. Because for all of us, we're having to make decisions to our PNP on staffing levels, processing times, how we actually allocate resources within the program based on levels that we find out about, you know, literally days before or even into different fiscal years and then have to try and adjust in-year.

So we, you know, historically had encouraged the federal government to do multi-year levels planning, which they finally got around to, and then they've changed it all again in that their three- or four-year multi-year levels plan lasted for one year and then entirely changed. And now I'm not actually sure what they, if they have a levels plan right now.

So well this is what the FPT meeting in May is going to be all about. And I would say, as well, this is kind of a multi-partisan frustration with the Government of Canada in that every minister of immigration in the country has the same challenge of basically trying to run a provincial nominee program not entirely sure what your allocation of numbers are but also then trying to allocate resources within. So we're working to clarify this with our federal counterparts.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister, Deputy Minister. Thank you for your detailed answer about that. Sometimes when I think about how our students coming from abroad. They spend about four years. They pay their tuition fee and they invest time over here. In four years it's a good time of duration that they can learn language. And when they graduate they have to go to different co-op and different kinds of jobs, and they develop work ethics as well.

And it is sometimes like very frustrating for some students when they do one work permit, and they can't get a job in the industry where they graduated from, especially if I talk about IT industry. We don't have a really big IT industry over here like say Ottawa or somewhere else like Microsoft. We don't have. And especially people in oil engineering, like petroleum engineering, we don't have a lot of industry over here. They can't get a job over here.

They're very well qualified. They can be a good resource over here in the labour market as well. After 9 months or 10 months that they can't get a job, they will have to leave the country. Is there any way that we can utilize those people over here? Because they are ready made; we are not investing any money on that.

On family sponsor nominee program or SINP program, when the family comes they will come as husband and wife. Might be both

of them will be not up to the level. They will still be draining money from our economy. They will go to Open Door. They might go on social services. They have children.

[21:15]

To bring a person at the age of 50 that they will be able to speak or learn English, it's going to be very hard. So these are the . . . [inaudible] . . . that we have, why not we have to utilize them so that we can fill the gap of shortage of our labour market?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah, no, I appreciate that. And you know, maybe I'll talk a little bit about the student part of it first. So you know, we have . . . There's been actually a lot of kind of attention nationally paid to some of the changes the federal government had made with regard to the number of temporary permits that were going to be issued for students. And I think, you know, in Ontario as an example, it probably is going to be a 50 per cent reduction, right, in the number of permits that are going to be issued. There's a reason that impacted disproportionately Ontario and British Columbia.

And I would say that there is a reason why that really is likely not going to have a significant impact if any impact in a substantive way on Saskatchewan. And it's because our post-secondaries really have been quite, very responsible about how they have built and grown their institutions to be really quite cognizant of making sure that international students are going to be in a position to be successful through their academic period and also then into a labour market period post.

You know, there have been some really terrible stories that have come out of other jurisdictions. And there's probably some here too where, you know, much less proportionately but it's because of the really very large increase in temporary student visas that have been issued by the GOC [Government of Canada] based on submissions from post-secondaries in other jurisdictions.

So we really are fortunate not to have that same issue that exists in some other provinces. But you know, what we really do seek to do though is make sure that those who are graduating, those who wish to stay here are going to be able to do that through our provincial nominee program or through a federal stream if that's what they choose to do.

But I'll maybe ask Christa to speak to this, but of those who go through our provincial nominee stream, there are a very high proportion that have been here in a temporary context prior to actually going through the SINP process. And a lot of those have been students. So we view this as being a long-term sort of relationship, which is not, I think, the case everywhere.

We want students who are here on a temporary document to stay here for the long term and build their lives here. I think the universities are of the same mindset that they actually see this as being a lifetime sort of thing not just a four-year "we'll take your money" and you know, that sort of thing. So that is a difference I think as to how Saskatchewan has approached this.

Feel free, Christa.

Ms. Ross: — Sure. Thank you, Minister. So just in case you are unaware, there is a student category through the Saskatchewan

immigrant nominee program. So it is designed, available specifically for the intention of trying to attract and retain international students who have chosen Saskatchewan to study, for all the reasons that you've already mentioned in terms of, you know, they've lived here for a number of years. They've completed post-secondary education in English and obviously would be skilled individuals now. So many reasons why we would want to try and retain them and support them to find employment in the province as well.

So I think last year, just to the minister's point, about 20 per cent of individuals coming through the nominee program were temporary residents. So that would include international students or also individuals who came perhaps through the temporary foreign worker program first. So 20 per cent of just over 7,000 nominations. We do know that the population of international students in Saskatchewan is higher than that. We do see some leaving after graduation, so choosing to find opportunities elsewhere in Canada.

And we have seen a trend as well for those who do stay and apply to the SINP, are nominated, and obtain their permanent residency. But that's also where we see lower longer term retention outcomes as well. So even, you know, for those international students, they may be individuals who studied for four years, worked for a year, applied through the SINP, you know, got their permanent residency perhaps two years later. And we are seeing that that's an area of the program where we have lower retention outcomes.

Now having said that, there's lots of reasons to try and improve that, their employment outcomes and their retention outcomes as well. And I would just say that any program or support or service that we offer at ICT would be available to them as well. We don't exclude based on residency status.

And I would just contrast that to the federal government who spends substantially more on settlement services in Saskatchewan. So they spend about 47 million every year on settlement services in Saskatchewan, but they don't provide service to any temporary resident including international students. So that's another area that we're trying to make some progress on through various channels and FPT forums as well.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you. I think we have less time. I have two questions. Just to quickly go with it. That Saskatchewan is at this time of the year, if I'm looking, we are the most attractive place to attract people not even from abroad but inside the province as well. Our member from Lumsden-Morse, he was talking the other day in the Chamber that real estate market . . . [inaudible] . . . that if you buy a house in Ontario, in BC, in Alberta, you will see a big difference. Whatever you can buy for 1 million, you can get it over here for \$400,000 very easily.

If we have a living cost and if we have that affordability there, still people are draining out of our province. I'm not saying that we have control on people to stay here. There could be a lot of reason that they have to. But as far as I can see the statistic, in five years, 40 per cent people drain down from the province.

When we are in good shape, we can retain. What's the best strategy we can use to make sure we can retain, reduce this 40 per cent — if I'm wrong, might be 30 per cent, but at least we

have to reduce that to 10 per cent — to make sure that we can keep them in province?

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — I appreciate that. No, and you know, our objective, we'd love everybody to stay that came through, you know, whether it be SINP or federal stream and located here. You know, you're right though. I mean the reality is that there's various reasons why people relocate, and that's fair. That's going to continue to happen.

But what we can do, I think, to maximize the number of people that are staying here, it really is kind of around economic opportunity. I think that is really one of the most significant components to that. So you know, continuing to create jobs, create opportunity, having in place training programs or credential recognition programs to maximize credentials obtained elsewhere.

I actually think this is going to be a competitive advantage we have on the credential recognition office and service once the message is, you know, out there. And we've just kind of started advertising because we've just started the office up, but the message will get out there that the easiest and best place to have a credential recognized in Canada is Saskatchewan. And I think that's going to really lead to a competitive advantage we have in that space for those who have a credential they've earned from elsewhere.

You know, there are other parts on kind of the program design element that we are looking at. I referenced a bit of that earlier, talking about the actual in-person recruitment with employers on the ground with officials where we're doing very rapid processing and ability to actually do face-to-face discussions about what long-term settlement plans are, and making sure everybody has the information too.

I mean if somebody's in, you know, Chandigarh or somebody's in Manila, they might not actually know all of the realities about . . . You know, it gets pretty cold here on occasion. And you know, we want to be transparent about that though. And I think the way you can be transparent about that is having these face-to-face discussions and really getting a sense of that long-term intent to reside. So that's a part of it. I think that there are a number of things we've been exploring internally as well. We've got, you know, a pretty good sense of what leads to good settlement outcomes. Employers, I think, are getting more experience in this as well because it is in their interest too. If they're, you know, providing a job to a newcomer, it's in their interest that there's a long-term retention in that space as well. So I think employers are gaining more experience and understanding some of those elements too.

I would be very confident in saying we are going to see an increasing retention rate. That is going to be the case. We're committed to that within the ministry and I think we have, you know, garnered some really positive insights into what is going to be indicative and what are the factors that go into a higher retention rate going forward. So we're committed to doing that and I think we're going to see success there too.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Minister. The last question that I have . . . I have a lot of questions but I'll ask only the time frame. I do understand that in past there were a few breaches that have been

to immigration data, and I think your office and yourself must have taken it very seriously. My question is, what is your plan in future so these things should not happen?

Ms. Bourgoin: — Thank you for the question, and most certainly we do take that very seriously. And so at the time that it happened, it certainly wasn't something we would anticipate from within our own ministry. And so we've taken a number of actions specifically related to recommendations from the office of the Privacy Commissioner around things that we can do in our ministry to ensure that that doesn't happen again.

And I'm very pleased to report that, you know, since that time, which has been more than one year, we have not had additional occurrences of privacy breaches, really based around how we can most effectively ensure that our colleagues within the ministry of ICT understand the responsibilities and the consequences for misusing personal information that may be available in the ministry as a result of programs that require a high degree of personal information.

We've also enhanced our training, used some of the technology tools that we have available. For example, in COVID it was very easy for our team to process immigration applications from outside of our bricks-and-mortar structure. That is not something that we do anymore. It builds more of a collegial relationship but also it reduces the risk when it comes to access to personal information. And so I'm very proud of my colleagues who are in the room today and the work that they have done to ensure that we do not have another occurrence within the ministry.

Mr. Burki: — Thank you.

The Chair: — All right, thank you. Having reached our agreed-upon time for consideration of these estimates, we will now adjourn consideration of the estimates for the Ministry of Immigration and Career Training. Minister, if you have any closing remarks you would like to make.

Hon. Mr. J. Harrison: — Yeah. I'd just thank the committee. Thank you very much for your very good questions, a very good discussion here tonight. And of course I want to thank our team here at Immigration and Career Training who do a great job, who are genuinely committed to the people of this province, I can tell you, and I feel privileged to work with. So thank you.

The Chair: — Mr. Burki, do you have any closing remarks you'd like to make?

Mr. Burki: — Thank you, Madam Chair. Thank you very much for all the office executive directors for preparing for that. Thank you for your professionalism. I would say that all the questions were very great questions answers, and thank you for that. I appreciate to be here, and I was really nervous that I might be sweating, but I think it went very well.

Thank you very much for all the help. Thank you, Minister, Deputy Minister, and directors. Thank you very much to be here today. Thank you.

The Chair: — All right, thank you, everyone. That concludes our business for this evening and I would ask a member to move a motion of adjournment. Mr. Ottenbreit so moves. All agreed?

Some Hon. Members: — Agreed.

The Chair: — Carried. The committee stands adjourned until Wednesday, April 17th, 2024 at 3:30 p.m.

[The committee adjourned at 21:29.]